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An Examination of Employment Precarity and Insecurity in the UK

A thesis submitted to Middlesex University
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

Employment precarity and insecurity are major topics of discussion within the sociology of work and in society at large. This thesis demonstrates the limits to the growth of precarity in the UK labour force. It contests the view that employment is becoming relentlessly more precarious in the neoliberal period. Furthermore, it challenges the view expressed by some theorists, including many on the radical left, that precarity is part of a recasting of class relations undermining the capacity of workers to challenge capital.

Precarity is defined here as an objective condition whereby employment becomes more contingent. It is measured through a study of non-standard employment and employment tenure, using surveys of the UK labour force. Non-standard employment has not grown substantially. Mean employment tenure has remained stable overall, having fallen a little for men and risen for women since the 1970s. While there are areas of precarious work, these tend to be hemmed in by permanent, long-term jobs.

This is explained through a Marxist theorisation of labour markets, emphasising the interdependence of capital and labour, and the role of the state in securing the reproduction of labour-power.

To help understand the resonance of the concept of precarity, subjective job insecurity is measured. Survey data shows little evidence of a secular rise in insecurity. However, in the 1990s, and again after the 2008-9 recession, concerns about the loss of valued features of work combined with a wider ideological climate of uncertainty to increase generalised job insecurity.

The findings of this thesis contest widespread pessimism regarding the capacities of the working class under neoliberalism, leading to practical implications for the orientation of the labour movement and the radical left. Finally, the research suggests changes to surveys of the labour force that would improve measures of precarity and insecurity in the future.

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1 Introduction

1.1 What is at stake?

Early in 1848 a 30 year old German revolutionary, exiled in Brussels, despatched to his printer in London the text of a manifesto for an obscure organisation known as the Communist League. It closed with the slogan, “Proletarier aller Länder, vereinigt euch!”—“Proletarians of all Countries, Unite!” (Marx, [1848] 1977, p.493; Nimtz, 2000, pp.52-55). At the time, the proletarians of all countries in the sense understood by Karl Marx, the originator of the slogan, must have amounted to a few million people. Even in Britain, by far the most industrialised country at that time, a slender majority of people still lived in the countryside; outside Britain, France, Belgium, Saxony, Prussia and the United States, there was no country in which more than a tenth of the population lived in towns or cities of 10,000 or more. Most of those on the land remained peasants engaged in small-scale, labour-intensive agricultural and handicraft production. Measured against the global population, the global proletariat was “numerically negligible”, perhaps 5 or 6 percent of the total (Hobsbawm, 1994, p.363; Hobsbawm, 2000, p.205). Yet, a century and a half later, around 885 million were believed to be wage labourers (Filmer, 1995, p.38, table 5-B). This growth has since accelerated. From 2013, for the first time in history, over half of those in the global workforce were, according to the International Labour Organization, now wage workers. They amount to some 1.6 billion people (ILO, 2013).

Marx’s emphasis on the proletariat is premised not simply on the potential of the class to expand numerically and geographically but on a set of capacities and interests with which it is imbued by its social position. For Marx, these exist objectively, regardless of the state of consciousness of the working class or the level of struggle. As he writes in *The Holy Family*, composed at the outset of his career as a revolutionary, “The question is not what this or that proletarian, or even the whole of the proletariat, at the moment *considers* as its aim. The question is *what the proletariat is*, and what, consequent on that *being*, it will be compelled to do” (Marx and Engels, [1845] 1956, p.53). It is the capacities and interests possessed by the proletariat, in contrast to the other classes of capitalist society, that make it, from Marx’s perspective, the potential agent of a social revolution that could overthrow capitalism and inaugurate a communist society.

Unsurprisingly, Marx’s propositions have from the outset been vigorously contested, whether by critics of a conservative, liberal or, a little later, social democratic, persuasion. However, what is striking today is the extent to which challenges to the Marxist position on class have become commonplace not simply among these critics but also among many who would identify with the radical left, including those who espouse “neo-Marxist” or “post-Marxist” approaches. These challenges—Kevin Doogan (2009, p.213) refers to them as “left harmonies in the neoliberal chorus”—tend to differ from more mainstream

versions in that they see the shift in terms of a transformation of the working class, rooted in changes to (or occasionally supersession of) capitalism, robbing workers of their pre-existing capacities and interests. Workers once had potential power, of the kind identified by Marx; they do no longer. This change is typically seen as a product of the advent of neoliberalism—or post-Fordism, globalisation, post-industrialisation or various other terms denoting a period that opened up after the economic crises of the 1970s.

Consider the following contribution by Slavoj Žižek, among the most prominent radical left public intellectuals alive today. In a piece written in the *London Review of Books* in the wake of a strike by up to two and half million public sector workers in the UK in 2011 he argued, “The category of the unemployed has...expanded to encompass vast ranges of people, from the temporarily unemployed, the no longer employable and permanently unemployed, to the inhabitants of ghettos and slums.” Of the strikes, which involved local government workers, civil servants, teachers, lecturers and health workers, many of them extremely poorly paid by British standards, he added:

These are not proletarian protests, but protests against the threat of being reduced to proletarians. Who dares strike today, when having a permanent job is itself a privilege? Not low-paid workers in (what remains of) the textile industry, etc, but those privileged workers who have guaranteed jobs (Žižek, 2012).

At the centre of such arguments are claims about the changing nature of employment relations and, specifically, the claim that employment has, for many or for most, become precarious. For brevity, thinkers arguing that a sweeping change of this kind has taken place will be referred to here as the *theorists of transformation*.

In one sense, it is not surprising that such views have taken hold most firmly among thinkers of the radical left. Many of the earliest critiques of what is now called *precarity* emerged in the late 1990s in intimate contact with social movements, only later permeating through academia (Bove et al, 2017, pp.1-2). However, today these views have echoes in many areas of discourse. Among those engaged in the sociology of work, employment relations theory or labour economics, who tend to reject the most extreme claims about the transformation of the working class, the notion of growing precarity is often part of the common sense. It is also an assumption frequently made by politicians of both the left and the right in the UK. In November 2016 the then Conservative Work and Pensions Secretary, Damian Green, gave a speech on the emergence of a “gig economy”, characterised by workers holding a self-employed status and undertaking work for an array of employers. He was reported as saying:

Just a few years ago the idea of a proper job meant a job that brings in a fixed monthly salary, with fixed hours, paid holidays, sick pay, a pension scheme and other contractual benefits. But the gig economy

has changed all that... People now own their time and control who receives their services and when. They can pick and mix their employers, their hours, their offices, their holiday patterns. This is one of the most significant developments in the labour market (Stone, 2016).

In the same month, Labour's shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer, John McDonnell (2016), wrote, "Precarious jobs and zero-hours contracts have become the norm in huge sectors of our labour market." There may be disagreement about whether the development is an exciting opportunity or a tragedy, but there is agreement here about the rise of new forms of work that lack the traditional character of an ongoing relationship between the employer and employee. Indeed, in summer 2017, in response to such putative changes, Matthew Taylor published a review into modern employment practices commissioned by the UK government. Although precarity is never explicitly mentioned, references to the "gig economy", "zero-hours contracts" and other forms of temporary work appear regularly (Taylor et al, 2017). The notion of growing precarity also informs the thinking of trade unions in the UK, with a recent report by the Trade Union Congress identifying "precarious work", "the sharp increase in zero-hours contracts" and rising insecurity among "better paid staff" as scourges of the modern labour market (TUC, 2015).

This thesis is motivated by scepticism about such claims. That is not to say that the working class has flourished and prospered during the neoliberal period. On the contrary, the working class has suffered major attacks in recent decades, but these attacks have not necessarily taken the form of rendering the working class as a whole precarious or transforming large sections of it into a "precariat" (Standing, 2011). Furthermore, if that is the case, then, despite historically low levels of collective struggle by workers, the working class may be in a better position to challenge and reverse these attacks than is generally thought even by those on the radical left. In other words, the classical Marxist approach to class and class struggle, if creatively applied to current conditions, may be more relevant than is usually supposed in contemporary discussions on the left.

This thesis, then, explores the strong claims of the transformation of employment made by the theorists of transformation in recent decades, along with more measured approaches within the sociology of work and related disciplines. It focuses on the concepts of employment precarity and insecurity, with the latter treated as the subjective dimension of the former. It tests the claims made against data in the case of the UK and offers an alternative reading of recent changes to employment based on a classical Marxist approach. Finally, it draws conclusions that can inform future research into work and employment, the practice of the radical left and the trade union movement, and the efforts to gather statistical data on the labour force.

1.2 The need for data

There is a mass of claims about the contemporary world of work, some of which seems to rely on a poetics of radical change that does not subject itself to empirical verification or refutation. So management guru Charles Handy could claim in 1994: “Before very long, having a proper job inside an organisation will be a minority occupation.” By 2000 business forecaster Richard Scase could confidently predict of Britain in 2010: “By far the greatest number of jobs will take the form of non-standard employment.” Will Hutton, the *Observer’s* economic editor, argued in 1998 that “full-time tenured employment would be a minority form of work” by the end of that century (cited in Overell, 2005; Doogan, 2005, p.66; Fevre, 2007, p.519). None of these claims can be substantiated by the data, and in these cases the authors do not even try.

Where the theorists of transformation do appeal to data there are, as is shown in the following chapter, significant problems with how this data is conceptualised, analysed and presented. In some cases, the claims are simply at odds with the data. This is especially problematic because notions such as precarity can become widely entrenched as a matter of self-perception without necessarily being grounded in reality. As such, the social roots of the perception deserve to be analysed in their own right. The potential for clashes between perception and reality in the sphere of employment is well known. For instance, a study of outsourcing demonstrated that across 15 European Union countries “there is no statistical relation between the intensity of offshoring and offshore outsourcing in a country and its public’s concerns regarding the phenomenon” (Kirkegaard, 2007, p.11). Ralph Fevre (2007) points out that media coverage of employment insecurity in the UK bears little relation to the actual likelihood of unemployment. Such examples do not necessarily mean that ideologies of precarity are consciously fabricated in a crude attempt to manipulate perceptions, particularly when they originate from radical left opponents of precarity. As the authors of a myth-puncturing book entitled *Myths at Work* put it, “Our argument is not so much that myths are deliberately used to mask reality, as that particular versions of reality have more ‘sticking-power’ than others and so become popularly accepted. Such explanations of social change are often one-sided and misleading” (Bradley et al, 2000, p.2).

Even where the claims made by the literature can be defended empirically, often an approach is taken that aggregates disparate and incommensurable categories. For instance, “non-standard employment” is a residual category, typically conflating part-time and temporary employment contracts. If this category is then used to demonstrate precarity of employment it presupposes what ought to be proven: that part-time work is inherently precarious. Similar objections apply to notions such as the precariat or the

groups that Žižek links together in the passages quoted above under the catchall title “unemployed”.

Finally, the theories of transformation are often developed in relative isolation from one another, rather than systematically building on prior theoretical and empirical work. This latter criticism does not simply apply to journalistic accounts like Žižek’s. Colin Williams, introducing his book, *Rethinking the Future of Work*, a careful attempt to separate hype from reality, points out that amid a cacophony of competing and contradictory visions there is seldom much effort to locate what is being said in the pre-existing literature. He goes on:

Similarly, in any other subject in the social sciences, re-packaging previous ideas and re-labelling them so that what is being propounded appears “new” is wholly unacceptable, especially if one fails to acknowledge what has gone before. Yet this approach is far too often the norm when studying the future of work (Williams, 2007, p.1).

The claims to be tested here are not claims of absolute continuity; that there have been important changes to work and employment is undeniable. Rather it is that a different approach, that of classical Marxism, is highly relevant to those seeking to explore these changes in the UK.

1.3 A note on terminology: precarity and insecurity

The terms *precarity* and *insecurity* are used in myriad different ways across a vast literature. Subsequent chapters will look in detail at how the terms are deployed, especially in the sociology of work; in doing so they will seek to offer a more precise set of definitions. Some of the findings of those chapters are anticipated here.

Precarity is used strictly to denote employment precarity, avoiding the broader ways in which the term has been used. This is taken to be a condition of *employees*, both in the narrow sense and also workers who are *de facto* dependent on an employer but lack this legal status, for instance workers in forms of “bogus” or “false” self-employment (Behling and Harvey, 2015). Precarity does not equate to poverty or poor working conditions, though there may be an overlap with these concepts. Here it will always be used to describe an *objective* situation faced by the worker. The objective situation in question is one *contingency of employment*.

In the wider literature, *insecurity* is sometimes used synonymously with employment precarity in the sense given above. However, here insecurity will refer specifically to *subjective* perceptions, and *job tenure insecurity* will refer to the perception of

contingency in employment. A worker may feel insecure without being precarious or may be precarious yet feel secure, justifying the analytical separation of these concepts.

1.4 The neoliberal period

The term *neoliberal period* is used to demarcate the period of interest for this study, and it too needs to be defined with some care. The changes to employment described here are generally seen by the theorists of transformation to be coincident with the emergence of neoliberalism, with the so-called “standard employment relation” of the post-war decades, at least in the advanced capitalist countries, viewed as a “stepping stone to a new stage of deregulation and flexibility in labour relations” (Bove et al, 2017, p.2). Massimiliano Mollona (2014, p.192) argues that in the advanced economies neoliberalism meant: “deindustrialisation”, which “led to new forms of precarious and often indented labour in traditional industries”, the rise of Toyotism, which involved polarisation “between a core and periphery” of the labour force, and the rise of “American companies, like McDonald’s and Walmart” that “entirely rely on unskilled and temporary workers with no union rights”. In the less advanced economies of the Global South, and particular in the larger of these, such as India, Brazil or China, a diverse economic landscape emerges in which “the only recognisable pattern is that of increased informalisation and precarisation of labour—whether inside or outside the factory” (Mollona, 2014, p.204).

The precise nature of neoliberalism, though, remains contested, and, to have any meaning, it must be firmly rooted in the political economy of contemporary capitalism. According to Ben Fine and others (2016, p.6):

In the social sciences literature, neoliberalism has generally been understood in four closely related and not always easily separable ways: (a) as a *set of economic and political ideas* inspired, unevenly and often inconsistently, by the (neo-) Austrian School and monetarism... (b) as a *set of policies, institutions and practices* inspired and/or validated by those ideas... (c) as a *class offensive against the workers and the poor* led by the state on behalf of capital in general and finance in particular... (d) as a *material structure of social, economic and political reproduction* underpinned by financialisation, in which case neoliberalism is the current phase, stage, or mode of existence of capitalism.

Fine and his co-authors privilege the fourth in their list of understandings of neoliberalism. However, this comes at the cost of seeing neoliberalism rather narrowly as synonymous with financialisation. The approach here is to see neoliberalism as a period marked by a combination of all four trends identified above. Its ascendancy followed the succession of economic crises that erupted across the advanced capitalist states in the

1970s and the breakdown of forms of capitalist development focused primarily on the national terrain, which had held sway in the first half of the 20th century (Harman, 2009, pp.191-225). This is broader than simply identifying neoliberalism with the emergence of financialisation, defined as “the intensive and extensive accumulation of interest-bearing capital” (Fine et al, 2016, p.8). Following Alex Callinicos (2012, p.67), neoliberalism can instead be seen as “an economic policy regime whose objective is to secure monetary and fiscal stability and that is legitimised by an ideology that holds markets are best treated as self-regulating”, of which financialisation is but one component. It is also a period of intensifying capitalist competition (Brenner, 1998), and the extension and intensification of market mechanisms beyond the private sector (MacGregor, 2005), which yields greater uncertainty and unpredictability, not simply within the marketplace but also within the workplace (Crowley and Hodson, 2014). In this context, the imposition of a market fundamentalism that, in the eyes of its proponents, “symbolises rationality” in practice engenders irrationality and instability (Clarke, 2005, p.61).

Based on this discussion, it is convenient to date the emergence of neoliberalism in the UK from the first of Margaret Thatcher’s governments (1979-83), which began to impose a neoliberal policy regime in a thoroughgoing manner, even if aspects had been prefigured during earlier Labour governments from the mid-1970s (Arestis and Sawyer, 2005, p.204).

1.5 Class, workplaces and classical Marxism

It is stated above that the explanations offered here are rooted in classical Marxist theory. This approach is discussed at length in the account of methodology. Here a few preliminary remarks are offered. First, *classical* Marxism refers to the Marxist method as elaborated by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, and by subsequent revolutionary socialists who, like the founders, oriented themselves on the working class as the agents of their own emancipation from capitalism.

Within this approach, class relations are embedded in the social relations of production (for a more elaborated version of this argument, see Choonara, 2018). In particular, the working class is excluded from effective control over the means of production and is subject to the appropriation of unpaid labour-time by a class of capitalists. The resulting exploitative relationship between capitalist employers and the working class is not simply one of oppression. It is a relationship of mutual interdependence, as employers depend on a class of exploited direct labourers to perform the work required in order to reproduce and expand capital. Put more simply, the working class is imbued with power due to its essential role in production and the functioning of society more generally.

The working class derives both its capacities and its interests from its common position within the relations of production; these are held to apply to workers throughout the history of the capitalist mode of production, regardless of the precise arrangement of the forces of production at any given moment. Moreover they are expressed as *collective* capacities and interests. This reflects the way that the working class is concentrated within workplaces. Marx (1990, p.439) argues, “Capitalist production only really begins...when each individual capital simultaneously employs a comparatively large number of workers, and when, as a result, the labour process is carried on on an extensive scale, and yields relatively large quantities of products,” a situation that is “true both historically and conceptually”.

While this thesis focuses on aspects of the employment relationship, which is treated as a nexus for class relations, it is presupposed in much of what follows that the UK economy remains a site of collective production by workers. Fortunately, there is strong evidence that this is the case. Pressure to increase productivity through capital-intensive, labour-shedding investment can reduce employment in particular workplaces, as can outsourcing of non-core aspects of the labour process, but at the same time, economies of scale can drive centralisation of work on larger sites. It should therefore be expected that these tendencies and counter-tendencies play out in a complex, historically determined fashion, rather than leading to an automatic decline or expansion in workplace size. The evidence suggests that the UK labour force remains one concentrated in medium to large workplaces. William Brown and Paul Edwards, drawing on data from Workplace Industrial Relations Survey (WIRS) and the later Workplace Employment Relations Surveys (WERS), offer a comparison between 1980 and 2004 (table 1.1).

Table 1.1: Distribution of workplace size, 1980 and 2004

| Employees | % workplaces | | % employees | |
|------------------|---------------------|------|--------------------|------|
| | 1980 | 2004 | 1980 | 2004 |
| 25-49 | 50 | 53 | 15 | 18 |
| 50-99 | 25 | 26 | 15 | 18 |
| 100-199 | 13 | 12 | 16 | 17 |
| 200-499 | 8 | 7 | 19 | 21 |
| 500-999 | 2 | 2 | 13 | 10 |
| 1000+ | 1 | 1 | 22 | 16 |

(Reproduced from Brown and Edwards, 2009, p.16)

The figures here exclude workplaces of fewer than 25 people. However, at least among the population of workplaces with 25+ employees, there appears to have been no dramatic shift of the distribution of during the period examined. The distribution of

employees (rather than workplaces) does reveal a significant drop in employment in workplaces of 1000+ employees. This suggests a stable number of large workplaces but with some decline in the numbers employed in them. Brown and Edwards summarise the findings as follows:

This overall pattern is the sum of two contrary trends. Manufacturing plants now tend to be smaller than was the case in 1980... But there has been an increase in size among private sector service workplaces, with the proportion that have only 25 to 49 employees falling from 62 percent to 56 percent. At the same time, there has been little change in workplace size in the public sector (Brown and Edwards, 2009, pp.15-16).

The first findings report for the 2011 WERS and the subsequent book by the same authors offer a breakdown of workplaces for the subsequent period (table 1.2). The inclusion of smaller workplaces (down to five employees) is helpful as an earlier study had concluded about the period from 1980-1998, “If there has been any decrease in workplace size over the course of the 1980s and 1990s, as many suggest, this phenomenon must have been restricted to that part of the population with less [sic] than 25 employees” (Millward et al, 2000, p.25).

Despite including many smaller workplaces, the 2011 WERS still suggests that almost half of employees covered by the survey are in workplaces of 100 or more people. None of the changes in the overall distribution since 2004 are significant at the 5 percent level. This stability in workplace size comes despite changes in the sectoral composition of employment, with a fall in manufacturing employment from 15 to 11 percent of the workforce, and a rise in “other business services” (from 14 to 17 percent of employment), education (9 to 11 percent) and public administration (6 to 7 percent), all significant at the 5 percent level (Wanrooy et al, 2013a, p.6).

Table 1.2: Distribution of workplace size, 2004 and 2011

| Employees | % workplaces | | % employees | |
|------------------|---------------------|------|--------------------|------|
| | 2004 | 2011 | 2004 | 2011 |
| 5-9 | 44 | 44 | 10 | 10 |
| 10-19 | 25 | 26 | 11 | 11 |
| 20-49 | 20 | 18 | 19 | 17 |
| 50-99 | 6 | 6 | 13 | 14 |
| 100-499 | 4 | 4 | 28 | 27 |
| 500+ | 1 | 1 | 20 | 21 |

(Based on data in Wanrooy et al, 2013a, p.6)

The UK economy remains one characterised by relatively large workplaces in which employees are concentrated. These figures do not capture the rise in self-employment in the UK since the start of the millennium. Although this is currently at its highest level as a proportion of the UK workforce, at about 15 percent, the recent growth, by 3 percent since 2001, is modest compared to the big surge from the early 1980s to the early 1990s (ONS, 2014). The overall size of the labour force, including self-employment, stood at close to 32 million by 2017, with a record three quarters of those aged 16-64 in work (ONS, 2017). Even taking into account the rise in self-employment, the employed labour force in the UK remains vast.

1.6 Research themes

This thesis explores the scale, scope and evolution of precarity and insecurity during the neoliberal period through a study of large-scale survey data for the UK.

Focusing initially on precarity, there are two ways in which this phenomenon can be studied based on such data. First, it is possible to look at the extent to which employment statuses have changed. Emerging from the literature is the notion that in advanced capitalist economies there has been a proliferation of “non-standard” contractual arrangements. It is possible to identify the areas of employment in which temporary and zero-hours contracts, and other similar forms of working, have been used, to chart their significance within the labour force as a whole and to see where their use is growing. Furthermore the way these contracts are deployed allows conclusions to be reached about the factors that drive the imposition of such contracts on employees. Importantly, it is also possible to set out the factors *limiting* the use of such arrangements.

An aspect of precarity that has become an increasing focus of attention in the UK is the growth of what has been dubbed the “gig economy”. This centres on workers who are formally classified as self-employed, though it tends to blur the line between false self-employment, in which employers simply seek to push risks and costs associated with employment onto workers, and genuine self-employment among what are sometimes termed “microworkers”, who undertake a range of self-contained, often badly paid jobs for a number of employers. Understanding the nature of the recent growth in self-employment is therefore essential to exploring the contemporary labour force. Here an attempt is made to assess the scale of different types of self-employment and again to see how they have grown and whether classical Marxist theory can offer insights into these processes.

As well as considering the form taken by the employment relation it is also possible to look at its longevity. Specifically, it is possible to measure the average duration of job

tenure experienced by employees and to test whether this has declined over recent decades. This is important in the context of highly liberalised labour markets because here it is entirely possible that employment could become more contingent without any transformation to the legal forms of employment used. The duration of tenure can be broken down by categories such as gender, age and occupation to study whether more short-term employment is a general condition or confined to particular areas of the labour force. Again, theories are offered explaining the tendencies affecting employment tenure.

Along with this exploration of employment precarity it is also possible to analyse the level of subjective employment insecurity and its evolution. A range of explanations of insecurity, derived from a survey of the literature, are considered and tested against data from different large-scale surveys. Here one innovation is to bring together different surveys, spanning different, overlapping periods, in a single visual representation to try to assess the overall pattern.

At stake in the discussions is not simply the reality or otherwise of supposed trends, but also the sources of the suppositions at play. Explanations are therefore offered for the extent to which the narrative of precarity and insecurity has become part of the common sense, especially for those on the radical left.

Naturally, confining the investigation to the UK imposes limitations in examining trends that are envisaged as taking place across global capitalism or at the least across the advanced capitalist countries. However, the UK represents an excellent testing ground for the claims of rising precarity and insecurity in the neoliberal period. It is widely accepted that the UK has experienced a particularly sharp reorganisation of its labour force, marked by the decline in manufacturing, accompanied by a rise in service-sector employment, and a pronounced drive towards privatisation and neoliberal economic policies more generally since the 1970s (see for instance Brown and Edwards, 2009, pp.1-2). In other words, if the theories do not hold here, their credibility elsewhere can no longer be assumed. Of course, it may well be that precarity has burgeoned in advanced capitalist countries with weaker economies, such as Greece or various states in eastern or southern Europe. Nonetheless, this is a quite different, and more nuanced, claim to the generalised growth of precarity under neoliberalism envisaged by many authors discussed here.

Finally, the adequacy of the data available from large-scale surveys in the UK is itself a theme of the research. There have undoubtedly been changes to employment in the periods of time spanned by the surveys of the labour force used here, not to mention the changes to the research interests of those using the data. It is therefore reasonable to ask

how well the data is fitted to the study of precarity and insecurity, and what if anything could be done to improve matters.

1.7 Structure of the thesis

The remainder of this thesis opens with a literature review covering the theorists of transformation (chapter 2). Rather than aiming at comprehensiveness, this focuses on key thinkers who have exerted a particular and distinctive influence on wider social thought, and who have something to say about the themes of precarity and insecurity. The chapter criticises aspects of these thinkers' writings both theoretically and empirically.

Chapters 3 and 4 offer perspectives on precarity and insecurity respectively. Within the sociology of work and related disciplines, precarity is a reasonably new concept, lacking consistent definition. Chapter 3 begins with a survey of uses of the term in the literature, which sometimes draws inspiration from the theorists of transformation while avoiding some of their wilder claims. Following this survey, precarity is defined as an objective feature of work, reflecting the contingency of the employment relation. It is argued that this can be measured through a study of the scope of use of certain forms of non-standard employment and through a study of employment tenure. The proposition that precarity is growing in the UK therefore leads to two subsidiary propositions—a proposition of de-standardisation of employment and a proposition of declining employment tenure. Chapter 3 therefore also reviews pre-existing studies of these two aspects of precarity. Chapter 4 follows a similar pattern but focusing on insecurity, treated as a subjective phenomenon. The chapter adopts a distinction between job tenure insecurity, reflecting fear of job loss, and job status insecurity, reflecting fear of deteriorating conditions in work (Gallie et al, 2017). Job tenure insecurity is defined here as the subjective counterpart to precarity; it is, in other words, the perception among workers that their employment is contingent. A proposition of growing job tenure insecurity is introduced. The chapter then surveys a selection of the existing literature on employment insecurity, setting out a number of possible explanations for rises in insecurity.

Chapter 5 expounds on the methods through which the propositions derived in chapters 3 and 4 are to be tested, and the data to be used. The chapter also outlines some limitations of the methods employed and explores the ethical considerations involved in the research.

Chapters 6 and 7 form an original empirical study of UK labour force data testing the two subsidiary propositions identified in chapter 3. Chapter 6 looks at the relevant non-standard forms of work, assessing their scope, concentration and evolution across the UK labour force. Chapter 7 considers the evolution of employment tenure in the UK

over the neoliberal period. The findings of chapters 6 and 7 are counterintuitive, and therefore they require theoretical innovation in order to explain them. This is provided in chapter 8, which offers a detailed theorisation of labour markets, with respect to precarity, grounded in classical Marxism. It is argued that the insights of Marxism can explain the trends in the data better than prevailing approaches within the sociology of work.

The final chapter before the conclusion, chapter 9, considers the evidence for the proposition of growing job tenure insecurity, as well as briefly examining patterns job status insecurity. Again the evolution of insecurity in the UK is seen to run counter to conceptions commonly found in the literature, although the data available on insecurity is weaker than that used to measure precarity. Some explanations for the development of the two forms of insecurity are offered.

The conclusion to the thesis sets out its implications for theorisations of class, and for the practice of political actors and trade unions. It also offers some reasons why the concept of precarity has become so resonant on the radical left in particular, locating this in a wider “retreat from class”. In addition, it highlights areas in which large-scale surveys of the labour force fall short in analysing precarity and insecurity in a contemporary setting and gives recommendations for how these problems could be addressed.

2 Theorists of transformation

2.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on a range of what might be termed “grand narratives” of the transformation of employment. Specifically it looks at broad accounts of changes envisaged as taking place during the neoliberal period that result, among other things, in the disempowerment of workers through increasing precarity.

In light of the comment of Colin Williams, cited in section 1.2, regarding the relative isolation from each other in which such theories are developed, some caution should be exercised in attempting to draw together these disparate approaches. For instance, the perspectives that have emerged from autonomist Marxism in recent years are at odds with the approach taken by the US sociologist of employment Arne Kalleberg or by those drawing on Guy Standing’s theory of the precariat.

In addition, the relationship between these grand narratives and the more detailed accounts of precarity and insecurity, considered in chapters 3 and 4, are rarely straightforward. Instead, these narratives should be seen as forming a broad theoretical backdrop in which the notion of precarity is increasingly part of the common sense. The extent to which writers with a more empirical focus draw on these narratives will be made clear in chapter 3 where the sociology of work literature on precarity is surveyed.

The chapter begins in section 2.2 with a group of writers—Ulrich Beck, Zygmunt Bauman, Richard Sennett and Manuel Castells—who produced pioneering accounts of an emerging precariousness of work in the neoliberal period. Section 2.3 explores a distinctive approach to the transformation of class adopted by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, and some in the autonomist Marxist tradition more broadly, which, while less focused on precarity per se, has become an important framework underpinning some contemporary writers on that theme. Section 2.4 looks at the work of Standing, for whom precarity denotes a specific class, the precariat, distinct from the wider working class. Dissatisfaction with this approach has led subsequent authors to focus on the autonomist perspectives discussed in 2.3 or to seek to disentangle precarity from the precariat, as discussed in section 2.5, which focuses in particular on the theoretical resources offered by the work of Kalleberg.

Finally, two broader concepts that frame discussions of precarity need to be considered (section 2.6). The first is the notion of dual or segmented labour markets. This has sometimes been offered as a theoretical framework to explain the division of workers into precarious and non-precarious groupings at the level of the labour market. The second is the literature of flexibility and the flexible firm, which sees both functional and numerical flexibility as a necessary counterpart to the neoliberal restructuring of employment.

2.2 Apostles of new capitalism

Theories of the transformation of capitalism and employment have a long pedigree. For instance, from the late 1960s onward, a series of writers, including Daniel Bell (1976), Alvin Toffler (1970, 1981), Alain Touraine (1971) and Peter Drucker (1969, 1993), from a range of perspectives, proclaimed the transcendence of industrial society and the emergence of post-industrialism. Much of this writing saw the shift to an “information based” society as at least potentially liberating, and some of it was positively Promethean. However, when a new wave of works claiming a sweeping transformation of employment developed from the 1980s onwards there was a notable change in tone. One recent author describes this as a shift from “utopia” to “ideology” as descriptions of post-industrialism moved from a vision of the future to a depiction of the contemporary world of work, often a bleak depiction (Vogt, 2016).

2.2.1 Ulrich Beck

Ulrich Beck’s book *The Brave New World of Work* is an apt example. He contrasts the “first modernity” of the emergence of the industrial system with a “second modernity” or “reflexive modernity” now upon us. He concurs with earlier writers on post-industrialism that we are seeing “the transition from a work society to a knowledge society”, but for him this development is leading to a “Brazilianisation of the West”, producing a world of “diversity, unclarity and insecurity in people’s life and work”. Furthermore this is seen explicitly as a consequence of the birth of a “neoliberal free-market utopia” (Beck, 2000, p.1).

Flexibility, a concept considered in more detail in section 2.6 below, is a hallmark of work in the new society: “Flexibility...means a redistribution of risks away from the state and the economy towards the individual. The jobs on offer become short-term and easily terminable” (Beck, 2000, p.3). The shift marks, for Beck, the end of the “work society”, in which people were integrated into the advanced capitalist societies through their willingness to work in exchange for their political rights. While in the past rising productivity and falling employment in some fields meant the emergence of new occupations that took up the slack, today the central issue has become “the end of full employment” (Beck, 2000, p.38).

Beck, in a technique that will become familiar, seeks to divide employment into two distinct groups—those in secure and insecure/flexible jobs—arguing that the latter category are expanding rapidly: “All around the world, flexible work and insecure terms of employment are growing faster than any other form of work” (Beck, 2000, p.84). This

argument is backed up by two pieces of evidence. The first: “In Germany between 1980 and 1995, the proportion of dependent employees in regular work situations fell from 80 percent to approximately 68 percent” (Beck, 2000, p.84). There was during this period the minor matter of German reunification; Beck does not state how this affects his figures nor does he explain what he means by “regular work situations”. According to a more recent study of employment in Germany, by 1996 “standard employment”, here defined as work with a permanent contract offering a minimum of 21 hours per week, made up 74.7 percent of the total (Holst and Dörre, 2013, table 7.1). The figures are not necessary comparable as the latter study does not refer to dependent work, and, unfortunately, without knowing where Beck obtained his data little more can be said about the accuracy of his claim.

The second piece of evidence: “According to OECD statistics...nearly a quarter of employees in the United States in the mid-1990s worked part-time or had no job security or both—compared with a fifth in 1982.” Beck does source this claim, with a footnote referring to pages 8 and 192 of the *OECD Employment Outlook, 1996* (Beck, 2000, pp.85, 183). Unfortunately, when this report is consulted the results do not support Beck’s argument. Page 8 gives the level of temporary employment in the US in 1995 as 2.2 percent. No figure is indicated for 1982. There is no other reference to employment in the US on that page. Page 192 shows part-time employment growing from 18.4 percent of the total in 1983 (there is no figure offered for 1982) to 18.6 percent in 1995 (OECD, 1996).

The contemptuous approach to data is particularly problematic because what these kinds of claim seek to justify is not simply a shift within class relations, but the redundancy of class itself as an object of analysis. Beck (2013, p.66) wishes to “overcome the epistemological monopoly of the category of class over social inequality...something which is evidently inconceivable for analysts of class”. In the new society, “Risk, and not class or war, is the determining factor of power, identity and the future.” Why, wonders Beck, are “a large proportion of leading sociologists...content to tinker around with obsolete categories” (Beck, 2013, p.72)?

2.2.2 Richard Sennett

Richard Sennett offers an even bleaker outlook on employment. He differentiates himself from the other “apostles of new capitalism” not over the nature of the changes to work but over the question of whether these changes have “set people free” or enhanced people’s lives (Sennett, 2006, pp.12, 13). A major theme in his writing is the breakdown of routine and bureaucracy, along with the growth of flexibility in people’s working lives since the 1970s, and the unsettling implications for those living in the new society.

At times, Sennett's work, which is based primarily on interviews and personal contact with workers, evinces a sceptical approach to some of the much hyped transformations said to have taken place, precisely because of his greater pessimism. For instance, on homeworking and flexible working, he points out, "A flexitime worker controls the location of labour but does not gain greater control of the labour process itself. By now, a number of studies suggest that the surveillance of labour is in fact often greater for those absent from the office than for those who are present" (Sennett, 1998, p.59).

However, Sennett accepts that underlying changes have taken place and deploys the same technique of dividing the workforce into secure and insecure sectors. Unfortunately, he also sometimes displays the same cavalier attitude to empirical evidence as Beck. For instance, in Sennett's (2006) *The Corrosion of Character*, we read on page 22: "The fastest-growing sector of the American labour force...is the people who work for temporary job agencies." Then, four paragraphs later, on page 23: "The fastest-growing sector of the labour force deals in computer and data-processing services." On the growth of flexibility, Sennett argues that the changes taking place include both the use of agency workers and the expanded use of fixed-term contracts inside companies. "It's easier to quantify the number of temps than of short-term workers within the firm," he writes, before baldly asserting that the total must be "something like a fifth of the American labour force" (Sennett, 2006, pp.48-49). Yet according to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, by the broadest measure, contingent workers made up an estimated maximum of 4.1 percent of the labour force in February 2005. Even if some of the 7.4 percent of "independent contractors", most of who are not classified as contingent, are added to the estimate, it is hard to see where Sennett's 20 percent figure comes from (BLS, 2005).

2.2.3 Zygmunt Bauman

Zygmunt Bauman, who began his intellectual career as a Marxist and continued long after to claim the mantle of Marxism (Dawes, 2011), has in recent years drawn on both Beck and Sennett in his discussion of what he calls "liquid modernity". This is modernity turned inwards on itself, dissolving not the old feudal institutions amid which industrial capitalism emerged but the collective institutions that were forged by early capitalism itself. Classes, for instance, are increasingly rendered redundant as people are forced to embrace a myriad of different identities, leading to an "individual, privatised version of modernity" (Bauman, 2000, pp.7-8). In place of class, Bauman appeals to a communitarianism based on the recognition of the irreducibility of individual differences, a "*republican* model of unity, of an emergent unity which is a joint achievement of the agents engaged in self-identification pursuits...a unity put together through negotiation and reconciliation, not the denial, stifling or smothering out of differences" (Bauman,

2000, p.178). This “republican unity”, given a more radical, emancipatory twist, also features in the work of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, considered below, under the rubric of the *multitude*. They, too, call for a new “postmodern republicanism” (Hardt and Negri, 2001, p.208).

Bauman is particularly interesting because he links the old capitalist society to the “rise of labour” and the formation of a class of dispossessed workers exploited by, but bound together with, capital. In the old society, labour was “embodied”:

One could hire and employ labour only together with the rest of the labourers’ bodies... To supervise labour and to channel it according to the design, one had to manage and supervise the labourers; to control the work process, one had to control the workers. That requirement brought capital and labour face to face and kept them, for better or for worse, in each other’s company (Bauman, 2000, pp.120-121).

By contrast, in the new society, the “disembodied labour of the software era no longer ties down capital: it allows capital to be exterritorial, volatile and fickle. Disembodiment of labour augers weightlessness of capital” (Bauman, 2000, p.121). Contemporary capitalism is “marked by the *disengagement* and loosening of ties linking capital and labour”, the “employment of labour has become short-term and precarious” and “working life is saturated with uncertainty” (Bauman, 2000, pp.149, 148, 147).

Finally, Bauman clearly connects the shift to new forms of work with working class impotence. He writes of labour struggles: “Whatever they gain today may be taken away tomorrow without warning. They cannot win” (Bauman, 2000, p.166).

2.2.4 Manuel Castells

Manuel Castells, like Bauman, began from Marxist preoccupations, in his case developing a distinctive Marxist approach to urban sociology, before coming to embrace the idea that the world was witnessing a fundamental transformation of work and the wider economy. Taking up some of the key theses of Daniel Bell and Alain Touraine, he claims that the years running up to the turn of the millennium witnessed a “process of profound restructuring” of capitalism characterised by increased flexibility, decentralisation and the growth of networks both internal and external to corporations (Castells, 2000a, p.1). These changes are detailed in a trilogy of works: *The Rise of the Network Society*, *The Power of Identity* and *End of Millennium*.

Castells continues to use many of the categories of classical Marxism, including that of the “mode of production”, characterised by the “structural principle under which surplus is appropriated and controlled” (Castells, 2000a, p.16). The current mode of production

remains, at least “for the time being”, capitalism (Castells, 2000a, p.160). He contrasts modes of production to what he calls “modes of development”, such as “industrialism” or “informationalism”, which he defines as “technological arrangements through which labour works on matter to generate the product” (Castells, 2000a, pp.14, 16).

The material foundations of his network society are the emergence of “*technologies to act on information*, not just information to act on technology”; the “*pervasiveness of effects of new technologies*”, because “information is an integral part of all human activity”; the “*networking logic*” of the new technologies in which novel structures emerge that give rise to a disincentive to being “outside” the network; the “*flexibility*” inherent in the network model that allows structures to be reconfigured; and “the growing *convergence of specific technologies into a highly integrated system*” (Castells, 2000a, pp.70-71).

Unsurprisingly, given these preoccupations, the Internet is seen as “perhaps the most revolutionary technological medium of the Information Age” that is now upon us (Castells, 2000a, p.45). Yet in part Castells seems to have fallen victim to the illusions surrounding the dot-com bubble of the 1990s, a profoundly dysfunctional intersection between high technology firms and the financial markets. At one point he seems to accept at face value the apparent capacity of exuberant markets to create value out of thin air:

There is a growing cleavage between material production...and value making. Value making, under informational capitalism, is essentially a product of financial markets... The new economy brings information technology and the technology of information together in the creation of value out of our belief in the value we create (Castells, 2000a, p.160).

However, when this belief founders, markets can come crashing down again. From spring 2000 to spring 2003, almost 5,000 dot-com companies failed and the Nasdaq composite index lost more than three quarters of its value (Wang, 2007, p.79). While Castells sees network equipment firm Cisco as the paradigmatic network enterprise, Ekbja and Kling (2006) argue this role might instead be played by energy firm Enron, which was heavily embroiled in the growing financial bubble in the run-up to 2001. Enron, rather than flourishing in the network society, collapsed into ignominious structural failure and scandal when the bubble burst.

Castells, unlike most of the theorists considered so far, offers a fairly detailed analysis of the composition of employment in advanced capitalist economies. He notes that in fact “the march towards information employment is proceeding at a significantly slower pace, and reaching much lower levels, than the trend towards service employment” (Castells, 2000a, p.224). Instead of trying to identify a specifically information based sector, he turns to a more fine-grained consideration of the service sector. In the UK there has been a small rise in distribution services (transportation, communication, wholesale and retail)

from 18.7 percent of employment in 1970 to 20.6 in 1990. Employment in producer services (banking, insurance, real estate, engineering, accounting, miscellaneous business services and legal services) grew more explosively from 5 percent to 12 percent over the same period, probably reflecting the increasingly important role of the City of London in the UK economy. Social services employment (healthcare, education, welfare, non-profit, post services, government, etc) expanded rapidly from 17.7 percent to 27.2 percent. Finally, personal services (domestic servants, hotels, dining, laundry, entertainment, etc) grew slowly from 8.1 percent to 9.7 percent (Castells, 2000a, pp.314-315, table 4.6). While this empirical data is welcome, it is not always clear how it relates to Castells' bold thesis of the network society. The overall findings, such as the decline in manufacturing and the rise of services are not controversial, but while they are said to be "characteristic of informational societies" there is no particular effort to show a causal connection (Castells, 2000a, p.244).

Perhaps more relevant to the discussion of precarity in this thesis is Castells' account of non-standard employment, which borrows Mark Carnoy's idea that there are four elements that together mark the process of de-standardisation. First, working time becomes flexible, with an end to "the traditional pattern of 35-40 hours work per week in a full-time job". Second, the resulting flexible work "does not include a commitment to future employment". Third, increasingly work takes place outside conventional workplaces at least some of the time. Fourth, there is erosion of the "traditional" employer-employee contract offering "well-defined rights, standardised levels of compensation, options for training, social benefits and a predictable career pattern" (Castells, 2000a, p.282).

However, the empirical evidence of transformation deployed by Castells is in this case limited and flawed. He lumps three different indicators together—the level of part-time work, self-employment and temporary work:

It appears that economies in various countries try different forms of flexibility in working arrangements... Thus, it seems analytically useful to proceed...combining different forms of non-standard employment in a single measure, while acknowledging partial overlapping of categories which, in any case, does not invalidate comparison between countries (Castells, 2000a, p.285).

Yet unless countries have exactly equivalent degrees of overlap for the three categories employment then the comparison *is* in fact invalidated by this procedure. Even accepting his procedure, there is a problem. The US economy plays a central role in new emergence of the new technological paradigm (Castells, 2000a, p.5). Yet from 1983-94 these non-standard forms of employment, as measured by Castells, declined in the US. This, he writes, is not a problem because there is "labour flexibility in the institutions of the

country”, so “non-standard forms of employment are not deemed necessary”. The evidence: “This would be reflected in a lower average tenure in the job in the US than in other countries” (Castells, 2000a, p.285). However, while job tenure in the US was 7.4 years in 1995, compared to 8.3 in the UK or 10.4 in France, job tenure was still lower in Australia, where it was 6.4 years (though he incorrectly gives the 1996 figure). He also mistakenly claims it was higher in the US than in Canada, before giving a Canadian figure of 7.9 years. In addition, a 1994 figure appears to be cited for the US and incorrect figures are given for various other countries (compare OECD, 1997, p.138, table 5.5; Castells, 2000a, pp.285-286).

Aside from the inaccuracies, the evidence here is not sufficient to support the claims made. If tenure more accurately measures labour flexibility in large swathes of the network economy, why offer an extensive discussion of non-standard employment for these economies? In Australia, which has even lower job tenure than the US, non-standard employment started higher than the US and rose through the period. It rose too in the UK but fell in Denmark. If the network society has made labour more flexible, surely a comparative study of tenure in different countries over the period would be more meaningful.

Why is there such a gap between the rhetoric of the transformation of work here and the meagre evidence? Although Castells rejects accusations of technological determinism, in practice an emphasis on technological transformation, along with the structural logic of the network, is the key to understanding the rise of his new society. It is as if the transformation of the technological basis of production can simply remould social relations to produce a “different brand of capitalism” (Castells, 2000c, p.372).

At first glance, Castells’ distinction between modes of production and modes of development seems to fulfil the function of Marx’s distinction between relations and forces of production. However, Marx’s categories, while being analytically distinct, operate together, in creative tension, to generate both dynamism and contradictions in a particular society. For Castells, by contrast, they operate at entirely different levels of analysis. The modes of production, once defined, are quietly dropped and, along with it, their specific social relations. The modes of development then offer the societal drive through particular technological arrangements (Joseph, 2010, p.130). In some of his writings, Castells is explicit about this:

Technology is embodied in technical relationships, which are socially conditioned... In principle...it could be assigned primarily to the process of production, in which we could then distinguish social relationships of production, and technical relationships of production, as proposed in the Marxian model, and as I had proposed in my own work. I now think this is questionable... In the last analysis, the

networking of production leads to the blurring of class relationships...production-based, social classes, as constituted, and enacted in the Industrial Age, cease to exist in the network society (Castells, 2000b, pp.8-9, 18).

A second problem is his deployment of the network metaphor, which Castells defines simply as a set of interconnected nodes, with the topology being such that two points that are in the same network are more closely, frequently or intensively connected than they would otherwise be (Castells, 2000a, p.501). With a definition so loose, it is hard to see what kind of organisational arrangement or institution could not be conceived of through the metaphor. Of course, in the substance of his writing Castells is contrasting the network form to what he sees as traditional bureaucratic and hierarchical forms of organisation. However, the supposedly networked enterprises analysed by Castells, including those adopting versions of Toyotism, often reproduce hierarchies in new forms, driven primarily by market relations rather than straightforward integration within the same firm. As one critic puts it:

[T]he Japanese [manufacturing] example...clearly shows that the different production units are not equal partners in the value chain. Control and dependence are reproduced in the supplier network. Outsourcing does not necessarily mean independence. In fact, it would be rather sarcastic to argue that the formally independent Asian footwear sweatshops are equal partners in the worldwide production network of Nike or Reebok (Hermann, 2006, pp.68-70).

Information technology can also be used to increase the bureaucratic pressure on workers in a given firm by monitoring their performance. This applies equally to formally employed workers and self-employed contractors, whose supposed autonomy is in fact constrained by their implantation in wider production networks (Hermann, 2006, pp.72-74). The evidence also points to an intensification of bureaucratic control in spheres such as the UK public sector, one of the country's largest areas of employment in the supposed network age (McSweeney, 2006, pp.25-28). More generally, even if we accept the network metaphor, we do not have to accept that contestation is external to any given network. Castells tends to "neglect...social struggles over networks. Social actors take positions *inside* networks...they are engaged in daily struggles...in the roles of managers and employees, producers and consumers or governors and citizens" (Van Dijk, 1999, p.135).

When he comes to look at the potential to resist capital, a major theme of *The Power of Identity*, Castells argues that while under "modernity" and "later modernity" subjects were constructed as collective entities on the basis of "civil society", the latter is now in a process of "disintegration" as in Bauman's liquid modernity. This makes socialism, which "emerged on the basis of the labour movement", obsolete (Castells, 2010, pp.11-12). Instead myriad different identity-based resistances emerge—based on sexuality, gender,

race, concern over the environment, and so on—each taking a more supple, networked form than traditional workers' movements. From somewhat different premises Castells arrives at a similar destination to Negri, discussed below, in celebrating the *alter-globalisation* movement, most prominent from 1999-2001, as a "network movement" against capitalist globalisation (Castells, 2010, p.147).

2.3 From Marx to the multitude

Some of the most far-reaching claims of transformation of work originate within the broad body of thought known as autonomist Marxism and which, through writers such as Antonio Negri, Michael Hardt, Mario Tronti, Paolo Virno and John Holloway, began to exercise a strong influence on radical left thought globally from the late 1990s. Here the focus will be on Negri, and his recent collaborator, Hardt, who present their arguments in an especially thoroughgoing and detailed form. While Negri and Hardt themselves are not overly preoccupied with the growing precarity of work, autonomism is today one of the key frameworks for those concerned with this issue, justifying a detailed consideration of this school of thought.

The Italian version of autonomism, within which Negri's ideas played an important role, emerged out of the movement known as *operaismo* (workerism). As the name suggests, in its original form it was preoccupied with workers' struggle, and in particular it focused on the "mass worker" forged in Italy's post-war factories, the site of major battles with managers and owners, especially in 1968-9. *Operaismo* posed an alternative to mainstream Communist thought, which was charged with dismissing workers' own experiences and militant impulses, and which was, for many, discredited after the Russian invasion of Hungary in 1956 (Tronti, 2012, pp.120-123). However, the price paid for the renewed focus on workers' activity was a highly subjectivised version of Marxism in which the whole impetus of societal change rested with the mass workers and their struggle against work (Tronti, 2010, p.187).

In this approach capital is forced to periodically reorganise in response to workers' activity. By the early 1960s Tronti had already developed a concept of the *social factory*, envisaging the whole of society absorbed into the system of factory production. However, this ambiguous concept, as well as suggesting the generalisation of factory work across society, could, as Steve Wright argues, also point the other way, suggesting the "broadening of the category of *productive labour* beyond the direct labour process". This would potentially undermine, even invert, the privileged position accorded to factory workers, though "nothing of the sort was to be forthcoming in Tronti's work of the 1960s" (Wright, 2002, pp.40-41).

It was only during the crisis of the Italian left following the “hot autumn” of 1969 that a number of theoreticians did proceed down the path opened by Tronti. The crisis arose because, to the surprise of many revolutionaries of the day, the official Communist movement, in the form of the Italian Communist Party (PCI) and the CGIL union confederation, proved resilient in the face of the rise of workers’ struggle. It was eventually able to re-impose itself over the working class movement, helping stabilise Italian society amid a growing unemployment (Callinicos, 2003a, p.123). The shock at this development was reinforced by a tendency for the groupings to the left of the PCI, forged in the mass struggles of the late 1960s, to exhibit a deep scepticism towards official union bodies and to abstain from intervention in existing political structures, seen as irrelevant to the factory struggle.

The exaggerated optimism of the autonomist groupings fed a perspective in which reformist organisations such as the PCI or unions could simply be sidestepped. As Negri’s later collaborator, Hardt, writes, “In their minds, they were not witnessing an Italian version of the Russian 1905, a dress rehearsal of some future event; rather these were the ‘April days’, the immediate prelude to [the 1917] revolution” (Hardt, 2005, p.7). But when the expected breakthrough failed to transpire, many autonomist groupings either evolved in the direction of terrorist organisations, as with the *Brigate Rosse*, or collapsed into seeking to influence the same bureaucratic structures they had previously dismissed. On the electoral terrain, the latter approach meant supporting the formation of a “left government” composed of various organisations including the PCI. The scenarios now circulating in far-left circles included the notion that Italy was at a crossroads between revolutionary transformation and fascism, and that the elections of 1976 would see a situation of intense political polarisation. The election instead proved a harsh reality check; the Christian Democrats won the largest share of the vote, and the PCI polled well, if not as favourably as in regional elections the previous year, whereas the far left saw its vote plummet (Harman, 1998, pp.206-208).

Already by 1971, Negri’s thought had already begun to evolve away from the focus on factory workers he had espoused in the 1960s, emphasising instead the need for a “direct assault on the state” by a political vanguard “outside...the determinate composition of the working class” (Negri, 2005a, p.11). Yet the break was not complete, and, in 1973, he would continue to argue that “the vanguard...is...the *working class of the large factories*, which is the privileged subject of exploitation”, even if the “infinite fantasy of liberated productive labour” now appears, not simply in mass strikes, but also “street fighting” and “armed struggle” (Negri, 2005b, pp.79, 80). However, just two years later, the implications of the reorganisation of capital are clearly expressed: “An overwhelming hypothesis then begins to take shape: *the category of the ‘working class’ goes into crisis, but as the proletariat it continues to produce all the effects that are proper to it on the social terrain as*

a whole" (Negri, 2005c, p.126). By 1977 a powerful student rebellion had erupted, engaging in increasingly violent clashes with the state, and now he would go further:

Some groups of workers...remain tied to the dimension of the wage... Insomuch as they are living off this political income (even some who work in the large factories), they are stealing and expropriating proletarian surplus-value—they are participating in the social-labour racket on the same terms as their bosses. These positions—and particularly the union practice that fosters them—are to be fought, with violence if necessary. It will not be the first time that a procession of the unemployed has entered a large factory so that it can destroy the corruption of the labour aristocracy along with the arrogance of political income (Negri, 2005d, p.251).

Negri's theorisation of a new revolutionary subject—the *socialised worker* facing capital not simply within but also outside the workplace—involved combining the subjectivism of *operaismo*'s earlier literature with a reconstruction of Marxist thought through a reading of the *Grundrisse*, one of Marx's early manuscripts for *Capital* (Negri, 1991). This led to a particular conception of class recomposition that would feature in all of Negri's subsequent writing. The argument is that each historic wave of struggle is predicated on a particular form of working class composition. For instance, in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the highly skilled "professional worker" was taken to be hegemonic. This includes the metal workers and engineers at the centre of many of the strikes around the time of the First World War. Under pressure of these struggles, the capitalist system was forced to reorganise itself. In the course of this, "the objective basis of that political composition of the proletariat has been swept away—absorbed and destroyed by the new structure of the capitalist state that emerged from the great crisis of 1929" (Negri, 2005a, p.12). It is on this new terrain that the mass worker, which would come to prominence in the post-war decades, emerges. This logic implied that the crisis produced by the struggles of the late 1960s could lead to a similar reconfiguration. By the time of its 1981 incarnation, Negri's periodisation contained four subjects: "*Undifferentiated worker* (1848-70)... *Professional worker* (1870-1917)... *Mass worker* (1917-68)... *Social-multinational worker* (1968 onwards)" (Negri, 2003, p.76). This kind of analysis would later be condemned by Sergio Bologna (2005, p.40), one of the founders of *operaismo*, as a search for "structural changes in class composition" as an alibi for defeat. In Negri's conception there is no need to explain failures in strategy: a new revolutionary subject will be along any day now.

Negri's theory came to international prominence with the trilogy of books co-authored with Michael Hardt from 2000: *Empire*, *Multitude* and *Commonwealth*. The issues at stake in these books are complex and manifold, drawing not simply on the Marxist tradition but also on post-structuralist thought, especially Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, on the

philosophical tradition of Baruch Spinoza and an eclectic range of other ancient and modern authors. Indeed the eclecticism is itself part of the method, captured by their use of the term *assemblage*, taken from Deleuze and Guattari's writing. As Timothy Brennan (2003, pp.357-358) puts it, "It expresses itself as a gathering of substantively incompatible positions...the juxtaposition of figures whose political views are mutually hostile to one another...is presented as the supersession of earlier divisions in pursuit of a more supple and inclusive combination."

Here it is appropriate to focus primarily on the concept of the *multitude*—Negri's latest answer to the question of the new revolutionary subject, caught up in the machinations of global capitalism, now redubbed *Empire*. In the multitude, the subjectivism of Italian *operaismo* and the ontological priority of the subordinate class over the dominant are preserved: "The multitude is the real productive forces of our social world, whereas Empire is a mere apparatus of capture that lives only off the vitality of the multitude..." Empire is itself generated by struggle: "The multitude called Empire into being" (Hardt and Negri, 2001, pp.43, 62).

Commenting on the work of other recent Italian autonomists they note their preoccupation with the tendency of labour "to become increasingly immaterial". Hardt and Negri's main criticism of this school of thought is "the tendency among these authors to treat the new labouring practices in biopolitical society *only* in their intellectual and incorporeal aspects. The productivity of bodies and the value of affect, however, are absolutely central in this context" (Hardt and Negri, 2001, pp.29, 30). Hardt and Negri (2001, p.209) give immaterial labour a different emphasis, focusing on the immateriality of *products* rather than the labour process: "Since the production of services results in no material and durable good, we define the labour involved in this production as *immaterial labour*—that is, labour that produces an immaterial good, such as a service, a cultural product, knowledge or communication."

Their argument is that three forms of immaterial labour are now hegemonic forms that other type of production must tend towards. The first is industrial production, which now combines information with material products. The second is a range of "analytical and symbolic tasks". The third type "involves the production and manipulation of affect and requires (virtual or actual) human contact" (Hardt and Negri, 2001, p.293). However, these processes do not simply occur within the world of work as conventionally understood:

As labour moves outside the factory walls, it is increasingly difficult to maintain the fiction of any measure of the working day and thus separate the time of production from the time of reproduction, or work time from leisure time. There are no time clocks to punch on the

terrain of biopolitical production; the proletariat produces in all its generality everywhere all day long (Hardt and Negri, 2001, p.403).

There is no distinction between work and other activities. “Even the prostituted body, the destitute person, the hunger of the multitude—all forms of the poor have become productive”; “labour cannot be limited to waged labour but must refer to human creative capacities in general” (Hardt and Negri, 2001, p.158; Hardt and Negri, 2004, p.66). This allows the term *multitude*, the modern proletariat, to encompass almost the entirety of society. It includes “*all* those exploited by and subject to capitalist domination... Some labour is waged, some is not; some labour is restricted to within the factory walls, some is dispersed across the unbounded social terrain” (Hardt and Negri, 2001, pp.52-53).

The shift depicted by Hardt and Negri can be questioned on five grounds. The first is that it involves a caricature of the Marxist conception of class, uncritically absorbed from *operaismo*. If members of classes share capacities and interests derived from a common position within the productive relations of society, then it stands to reason that the working class includes groupings other than mass workers in manufacturing. It is precisely the narrowness of *operaismo*’s conception of the working class that leads to the collapse into the all-encompassing category of the multitude.

A second problem concerns the theorisation of the forces and relations of production. It has already been noted of earlier theorists such as Castells that there is a tendency to allow the forces of production to simply reconfigure the relations of production. Hardt and Negri take this a step further: for them there is no longer any distinction. “Production becomes indistinguishable from reproduction; productive forces merge with relations of production; constant capital tends to be constituted and represented within variable capital, in the brains, bodies and cooperation of productive subjects” (Hardt and Negri, 2001, p.385). Because the key productive forces are the body and mind of the worker, any change to the productive forces is immediately a transformation of the relations of production, which is also immediately a transformation of the social terrain, because production is always and everywhere.

A third issue is the breakdown of the value relation. Is it really the case that the hunger of the poor or the process of dreaming is productive of value? Labour-power generally is formed and reproduced outside the capital-labour relationship, and the manner in which this takes place has implications for the fortunes of capitalist exploitation. It is legitimate to ask how it is that Empire can absorb value from these processes in a way it could not in prior forms of capitalist production. There is a tension in Hardt and Negri between the desire to see production spanning the whole social terrain, through what they call “biopolitical production”, which creates “[w]ho we are, how we view the world, how we interact with each other” (Hardt and Negri, 2004, p.66), and a more prosaic focus on the capital-labour relations characteristic of capitalist employment. The issue comes to a head

over the question of exploitation. If value can no longer be quantified by measuring the duration of abstract labour, how can there be a meaningful concept of Empire's appropriation of value generated by the multitude?

For instance, Hardt and Negri at one point invoke the notion, used in mainstream economic theory, of "externalities", including "the education system, the public and private infrastructure of roads, railways, phone lines and fibre optic cable, as well as the general cultural development of the population", such as its "intelligence, affective skills and technical knowledges". Capital benefits from these but they are "external sources of wealth". Leaving aside the fact that provision of phone lines and fibre optic cable may be carried out by capitalist corporations, if the whole of society is subsumed into production, how can it be the case that this is "social wealth created outside the direct productive process"? Indeed, it is not clear why, if it is true that "the entirety of social life is caught up in capitalist relations...life itself is being exploited", it would also be the case that "the value...can be captured only in part by capital" (Negri, 2008, p.4; Hardt and Negri, 2004, pp.147, 148).

The authors attempt to solve this problem by introducing a notion of "the common", a sort of commonly held social stock of knowledge, language and relationships, which forms both the "presupposition and result" of immaterial production, as well as the terrain on which immaterial production in fact occurs, because such production is "common, collaborative and communicative" (Hardt and Negri, 2004, p.148). "Exploitation is the private appropriation of part or all of the value that has been produced as common" (Hardt and Negri, 2004, p.150). There are several ways one could conceive of this taking place. One is simply plunder. Something that was previously a social good is turned into capitalist property. However, this is hardly a new phenomenon. Indeed the whole notion of the "common" leads back to the land owned in common by the peasantry prior to the enclosure acts, discussed in detail by Marx under the heading of "so-called primitive accumulation" (Marx, 1990, pp.871-940). Another sense in which this encroachment might take place is through the privatisation of public services. However, this is explicitly a process that subordinates forms of work that were previously undertaken on a non-profit basis (even if they might have benefits for capital) to the logic of traditional capitalist profit-making. As such it is explicable in the traditional value theoretical terms of Marxism.

A final sense in which the commons are turned over to profit-making is that of capital obtaining goods produced outside the capital-labour relationship and using them to generate a profit. One obvious example, mentioned by Hardt and Negri, is that of open source software, which is often today used by profit-making companies internally and, in some cases, forms the basis for commercial products. Yet they have an extraordinarily rose-tinted view of this field of production. To take the example of the highly successful

Linux operating system, the vast majority of changes to the code, 37,000 of the 38,000 recent changes according to one author in 2004, were made by just 100 programmers, all of them paid by their employers to work on Linux. The main employers included Intel, IBM, Hewlett Packard, all keen to use their vast resources of accumulated capital to try to break Microsoft's near monopoly on PC operating systems (Jackson, 2004; Choonara, 2005). Even if the myth that open-source software is somehow created free from the taint of capital is accepted, it is far from clear that its methods of creation are inherently superior. Without a high degree of centralisation many projects develop slowly, with time wasted as people work on identical areas, or they fizzle out as people lose interest or become fragmented into rival groups (Bezroukov, 1999; Choonara, 2005).

A more general objection is that focus on the appropriation of the commons neglects the extent to which capitalist firms, including those in the field of "immaterial labour", in actuality generate profits by old-fashioned appropriation of surplus-labour from their employees within the workplace, still a vast accumulation of fixed capital and employees (see the discussion in Choonara, 2015, pp.166-172).

The fourth challenge to the analysis by Hardt and Negri is to question whether the trends identified are borne out in reality. This is particularly hard to assess as Hardt and Negri claim that the transformation might not register at the level of statistics and only occasionally is empirical data hinted at. According to Hardt and Negri (2004, p.114), "In the dominant countries, immaterial labour is central to most of what statistics show are the fastest-growing occupations, such as food servers, salespersons, computer engineers, teachers and health workers"—which is simply to say, as is generally accepted, service sector jobs make up an ever larger share of the labour force. However, this does not mean the hegemony of "labour that is primarily intellectual or linguistic, such as problem solving, symbolic and analytical tasks, and linguistic expressions. This kind of immaterial labour produces ideas, symbols, codes, texts, linguistic figures, images and other such products" (Hardt and Negri, 2004, p.108). As Paul Thompson (2005, p.80) notes: "If this language reminds the reader of something prominent in contemporary business and public policy discourses, it is no coincidence...this appears to be remarkably similar to knowledge economy arguments... In the information age, capital and labour are said to have been displaced by the centrality of knowledge, brawn by brain; and the production of goods by services and manipulation of symbols."

As Thompson points out, the "physicality" of the product is "wholly irrelevant. Knowledge and intangible assets, whether in services or any other form, can be calculated, rationalised, rule-governed and ultimately commodified". The "work of expert or scientific labour is subject to exploitation and control...for example, through performance metrics, project monitoring procedures, packaged software products and automation". Furthermore, far from knowledge remaining the property of the worker, its

transformation into a saleable commodity requires that it be separated from them (Thompson, 2005, pp.84-86).

The final issue with Hardt and Negri's analysis relates to their philosophical framework. They are torn between Marxism, albeit a variant that dismisses the dynamic of competitive accumulation, and a poststructuralist preoccupation with power abstracted from social relations. Within the classical Marxist tradition, power relations are conditioned by social relations, but in Hardt and Negri "power constitutes society, not the other way round" (Bull, 2001). As Callinicos (2003a, p.130) writes, "Negri explicitly connects his version of Marxism with poststructuralism, declaring, 'The theory of surplus value breaks down the [class] antagonism into a microphysics of power.'" Having moved along this trajectory, Hardt and Negri can incorporate many commonplace claims about the nature of work without having to ground them empirically or relate them to a particular conception of the social relations of capitalism. For instance, they see a tendency "for immaterial labour to function without stable long-term contracts and thus to adopt the precarious position of becoming flexible", and for the emergence of "smaller and more mobile labour units" (Hardt and Negri, 2004, pp.66, 82).

It is this kind of approach that has allowed theories of work derived from autonomism to merge together with other approaches to precarity. This is particularly important in informing a critique that both contests and embraces aspects of precarity, with a range of authors emphasising struggles that "refused work and the identity made between work and life" (Bove et al, p.3). The convergence between autonomism and broader writing on precarity features, for instance, in the work of Angela Mitropoulos, notably in "Precari-Us?", published in a special "precarious issue" of *Mute* magazine in which several authors blend together an emphasis on precarity with elements drawn from autonomism (Mitropoulos, 2006; Mitropoulos, 2011).

Mitropoulos (2006) claims, for instance, that "an increasing proportion of the workforce is engaged in intermittent or irregular work," but tends to see this as a breakdown of traditional forms of "Fordism" favoured by unions and social democratic organisations, which were, anyway, an "exception in capitalist history" on a global scale. In an echo of Negri, we read: "[T]he flight from 'standard hours' was not precipitated by employers but rather by workers seeking less time at work." The "refusal of work", as it was dubbed by autonomists in the 1970s, here pre-dates "the 'flexibilisation' of employment". As such precarity is not primarily a problem to be solved but a state to be embraced and radicalised:

The term "precarity" might have replaced "precariousness" with the advantage of a prompt neologism; yet both continue to be burdened by a normative bias which seeks guarantees in terms that are often neither plausible nor desirable. Precariousness is mostly rendered in

negative terms, as the imperative to move from irregularity to regularity, or from abnormality to normality (Mitropoulos, 2006).

So, “analyses and political struggles around precarity are often in danger of reasserting the politics of Fordism—not in any actual material sense, since the conditions which made that possible have been surpassed by various struggles, but as the resurgence of affective attachments to conservative agendas” (Mitropoulos, 2011).

2.4 From precarity to the precariat

We have already encountered in many of the theorists of transformation a preoccupation with the increasingly contingent, flexible and precarious nature of the employment relationship, which is sometimes dubbed *precarity*. In the most explicit versions of this thesis, those subject to this transformation are accorded a new title, the *precariat*.

According to the survey by Barbier (2002), the term *précarité* originates in the work of French sociologists in the late 1970s, in particular Angès Pitrou, who used the term to describe a situation in which family or household solidarity breaks down, potentially condemning an individual to poverty. In this context there was only a weak relationship to precarious employment, and the notion was strongly rooted in studies of poverty. Barbier identifies three other meanings that *précarité* came to assume. The first of these emerged as employment was identified as a source of the condition of precarity. The term was now associated with the emergence of a range of “atypical jobs” or “*formes particulières d’emploi*”. In this sense *précarité* was “linked to precariousness as a social status primarily related to employment” (Barbier, 2002, p.3). Slightly later, a second new usage emerged as *précarité* became a term of political and administrative discourse, referring specifically to precarious employment *contracts*. Finally, from the early 1990s the term was used without qualification to refer to “the risk and uncertainty associated with employment situations” in general (Barbier, 2002, p.4). In this sense, the concept was further delinked from its early associations with poverty to become instead a “social background present everywhere in society” (Barbier, 2002, p.4). The celebrated work of Pierre Bourdieu made *précarité* a form of domination characterised by a feeling of insecurity (see, for instance, Bourdieu, 1997).

Similar terms would, after this time, be widely used in Italy and Spain and, in those contexts, often denoted a condition of employment, though the other meanings could easily blend and hybridise with this (Barbier, 2008, p.34; Munck, 2013, p.751; Doogan, 2015, p.44). At the turn of the millennium there was no generally accepted equivalent term in academic discourse the Anglophone world. However, the neologism *precarity*, as opposed to the already existing word *precariousness*, was now occasionally used, perhaps chosen to capture the multiplicity of meanings in the French usage (Barbier, 2008, p.37;

Barbier, 2011, p.29). The term occurred in discussions that accompanied the cross-border mobilisations against the Bretton Woods institutions in the early 2000s. For instance, in the European Social Forum movement translators and English-speaking activists would often grope for a suitable equivalent. Precarity was also a major theme of the EuroMayDay protests that began to be held in various European cities in the same period. By 2004 the term had become acceptable enough that activists meeting at Middlesex University, at a fringe event during the London European Social Forum, could launch “The Middlesex Declaration of Europe’s Precariat” (Foti, 2017, p.149).

By the run-up to the financial crisis that began in 2007 there were currents that self-identified as movements of the precarious in several southern European countries (Barbier, 2011, pp.29-30; Neilson and Rossiter, 2008, pp.51-53; Nunes, 2004; Standing, 2011, p.2; Fonesca, 2013; Palmer, 2014, p.44). Given that the perspectives of autonomism, including that of Hardt and Negri, considered above, had begun to permeate the movement, precarity was sometimes used in an ambiguous manner: “Precarity was considered simultaneously a new system of exploitation and a practice of liberation from the previous system of exploitation” (Papadopoulos, 2017, p.138; for more on the influence of autonomism see Foti, 2017).

The term *precariat* to denote a certain grouping subject to precarity gained far greater currency in the English-speaking world with the publication in 2011 of Guy Standing’s book *Precariat: The New Dangerous Class*, which draws on and popularises a more detailed 2009 study entitled *Work After Globalization*. The term was further boosted by its inclusion as a category in the BBC’s “Great British Class Survey”, with Standing cited as a key source (Savage et al, 2013, p.243). Google scholar lists just 120 books and papers containing the term published in 2010; by 2015 this had grown to 1,590. The precise term does not occur at all before 2000 (the few instances on Google Scholar are incorrectly dated). By the time Standing’s book emerged, usage of precarity encompassed elements of Bourdieu’s preoccupations but could also extend to or even focus on the transitory nature of employment relations; its very success derives in part from its vagueness. The editors of a recent collection on the theme suggest that “precarisation and precarity cannot be unquestionably grounded in factual evidence,” as if this is an argument in its favour (Della Porta et al, 2015, p.9).

As Kevin Doogan writes, “[P]recarity in its different versions has become part of the radical common sense amongst activists, trades unionists, and social movements, and this ‘meme if the moment’ is becoming established as a major concept, if not a meta narrative, across swathes of social science in Europe and North America” (Doogan, 2015, p.44). It is however noteworthy that the academic appropriation of the term came after many of the early struggles against precarity had already been absorbed into wider social movements in the wake of the 2008-9 economic crisis. This is a source of consternation for some

radical left theorists attracted by earlier struggles, particular those sympathetic to autonomism. Papadopoulos (2017, pp.138) writes: "Ironically the moment the 'war' [against precarity] was lost is also the moment popular media as well as academia discovered the term precarity and turned it into a synonym for insecurity or a sociological category." Standing in particular is chastised as someone who misses "the point of the precarious movement" and strips "precarity of its real social and political transformative potentials" by seeing precarity in narrow employment terms and ignoring the extent to which it involved a positive refusal of convention forms of work (Papadopoulos, 2017, p.144). That being said, other writers who espouse many of the perspectives of autonomism, nonetheless end up advancing a definition little different from that of Standing and others. For instance, Alex Foti (2017, p.152) writes: "So what is the precariat? It is the mass of people who are temporary, part-time and/or freelance workers under advanced capitalism."

Standing's own approach is closer to Weberian sociology than Marxism. However, he shares with many post-Marxist writers the notion that there was, during what he calls the "industrial citizenship era", a concept of the working class that "shaded intellectual thinking, collective action and state policy", and that the emergence of neoliberalism led to an unravelling the post-war "class compromise", eroding the pre-existing class structure (Standing, 2009, pp.57-58, 98; Standing, 2011, pp.6, 8).

For Standing the class structure of contemporary capitalism features, alongside archaic classes that pre-date capitalism, multiple new classes. There is an "elite" whose members are "absurdly rich". They hold political power, but income seems to be the main criterion for membership. Below this elite class come the "salaried", who are "still in stable full-time employment...with their pensions, paid holidays and enterprise benefits...concentrated in large corporations, government agencies and public administration, including the civil service". In recent times some of this group have been subject to "bureaucratic proletarianisation", through "[t]arget-based labour relations and a culture of processing people", leading to "psychological withdrawal". At the same level in the social structure as the salariat are "proficians" who have "bundles of skills they can market, earning high incomes on contract, as consultants or independent own-account workers". This is seen as an "emerging social category". Beneath these groups "in terms of income and status" is "a shrinking 'core' of manual employees, the essence of the old 'working class'". Finally, there is the precariat, consisting "of people who have minimal trust relationships with capital or the state, making it quite unlike the salariat. And it has none of the social contract relationships of the proletariat, whereby labour securities were provided in exchange for subordination and contingent loyalty, the unwritten deal underpinning welfare states". Below these groups come only "the unemployed and the detached" (Standing, 2011, pp.7-8, 14; Standing, 2009, pp.99, 102-115).

One immediate issue with this scheme is the extraordinarily narrow definition of the traditional working class, composed only of manual workers. Furthermore, for Standing, the epoch of the working class was one characterised by “a society consisting mostly of workers in long-term, stable, fixed-hour jobs with established routes of advancement, subject to unionisation and collective agreements, with job titles their fathers and mothers would have understood, facing local employers whose names and features they were familiar with” (Standing, 2011, p.6). By these criteria, the proletariat only existed for a few decades around the middle of the 20th century, if at all. For instance, in Britain union membership peaked at 53 percent of the workforce in 1979 (Machin, 2000, p.631). For the vast bulk of the history of capitalism, in Britain as for other developed countries, unionisation only covered a minority of the population. The written labour contracts that Standing seems to imagine are typical of proletarians were only introduced in Britain in the 1960s (Brown and Edwards, 2009, p.8). As Jane Hardy (2017, pp.269-270) argues, Standing’s working class appears to be based on “the image of a largely stable male, union card-holding and ‘boiler-suited’ proletariat” that was always a “cartoon” figure.

Bryan Palmer offers a similar criticism. He summarises Standing’s argument: “Stable working class identities have been swept aside; a sense of proletarian power as a transformative agent of social relations of exploitation and oppression is now ended.” He locates this within a “three decades old ‘retreat from class’” in which the latest version is “centred on insisting that old class structures and agencies have been replaced by new ones, albeit class formations that are defined by their distance from structures of class place” (Palmer, 2014, p.43).

But this, insists Palmer, is “a fundamentally ahistorical argument, for work has never been anything but a precarious foundation of life lived on the razor’s edge of dispossession”. The working class of the British industrial revolution was formed in the first instance through a process of “the dissolution of landed relations and the destruction of village handicrafts” that impelled these early proletarians into the metropolis. Palmer concludes, “Class has always embodied differentiation, insecurity and precariousness. Just as precariousness is historically inseparable from class formation, there are invariably differentiations that seemingly separate out those with access to steady employment and secure payments from those who must scrabble for work and access to the wage” (Palmer, 2014, pp.44, 48-49). Similarly, Hardy (2017, p.267) notes both that the “standard employment contract was specifically the outcome of a changed balance between capital and labour in the Western hemisphere in the cold war period” and that there are striking examples of groups of workers historically regarded as precarious in the period prior to that resisting capital. For instance, the “New Unionism” that erupted in Britain from 1889 was sparked by a strike among dock workers of whom only 10 percent were in permanent employment (Hardy, 2017, p.267).

If the notion of the precariat is historically suspect even for developed countries such as the UK, it is ludicrous when considered more broadly. Ronaldo Munck (2013, p.752) writes that “the type of work described by the term ‘precarity’ has always been the norm in the global South. In fact, it is Fordism and the welfare state which is the exception to the rule from a global perspective.”

Munck also sets the notion of the precariat in the context of a range of historical theories. First, there was the “theory of ‘marginality’” which “emerged in...Latin America in the 1960s”. This sought to explain the emergence of internal migrants who did not seem to be integrated into industrial capitalism. However, in practice “there was little evidence that a labour elite or labour aristocracy had formed, separate from and even opposed to the marginal masses... There was considerable continuity in terms of employment patterns...rather than a rigid divide.” By the 1970s, in an African setting, there was an identification of an “informal sector”, who often owned some of the means of production and whose techniques were “non-capitalist intensive” with a rudimentary division of labour. The formal-informal divide was taken up by the International Labour Organization, coming to embrace “a whole range of occupations, from small-scale manufacturing and retail to domestic service and various illegal activities”. The 1980s saw a new concept of “social exclusion”, this time applied to European societies, involving an “urban underclass” excluded from “employment but also from the political process and shared cultural worlds” of these societies (Munck, 2013, pp.748-750). Standing does not pause to situate his account in this broader context or to specify how the category of the precariat differs from its predecessors.

However, it is not simply the historical amnesia that is problematic in Standings’ work. The weaknesses of his definitions mean that Standing’s precariat can be at once everybody and nobody. Much of Standing’s discussion is purely descriptive, so it is hard to ground it in any statistics: “To be precariatized is to be subject to pressures and experiences that lead to a precariat existence, of living in the present, without a secure identity or sense of development achieved through work and lifestyle” (Standing, 2011, p.16). He nonetheless argues: “[I]n most countries, the statistics show that the number and share of national labour forces in temporary statuses have been rising sharply over the past three decades” (Standing, 2011, p.15). However, this is certainly not the case across the OECD countries. Here the incidence of temporary employment rose from 9.2 percent in 1980, peaked at 12.2 percent in 2006 and 2007, then fell back to 11.8 percent in 2013 (OECD, 2015).

The vagueness of the precariat concept is systemic because nobody is an unqualified member. The groups he identifies are all “near it”, “close to it”, “linked to it”, “at risk of joining it”, and so on. Nonetheless, “we may guess that at present, in many countries, at least a quarter of the adult population is in the precariat”, although he does not say which

countries (Standing, 2011, p.24). One exception is his claim that the two million people described by the Trade Union Congress's Commission on Vulnerable Employment in the UK as "trapped in a continual round of low-paid and insecure work where mistreatment is the norm" are "solidly in the precariat" (Standing, 2009, p.112). However, this involves the commission's own selection of criteria for precariousness. The three largest components are unqualified workers on less than £6.50 an hour (just under a million); qualified temporary workers on less than £6.50 an hour (just over half a million); and an additional half million, which is the authors' guess for the number of undocumented migrant and informal workers (CoVE, 2008, pp.23-24). We can speculate whether the then British Chancellor George Osborne's announcement in 2015 that he was instituting a new minimum wage level for over-25s of £7.20 an hour would, in Standing's account, automatically shift people between classes.

In fact, Standing tends to vacillate between seeing the precariat as a class and then pulling back from the implications of this, stressing that, as Arne Kalleberg (2012a, p.685) puts it, it is "a 'class-in-the-making', but has not yet developed the characteristics of a 'class-for-itself' that has the potential to engage in collective action". Kalleberg, whose own distinctive approach to precarious labour is discussed below, questions whether it is meaningful to view the precariat as a class given its internal divisions, but, curiously enough, concludes: "Standing makes a compelling case that while the members of the precariat may have differential relationships to the means of production, they still have many vital interests in common and thus it is strategically useful to think of them as constituting a class" (Kalleberg, 2012a, p.686).

On the contrary, it is the enormous aggregation of categories by Standing that forms the most problematic aspect of his work. Consider the following assertions. "[M]ost who find themselves in temporary jobs are close to being in the precariat." "Another avenue into the precariat is part-time employment." "[T]hose who are dependent on others for allocating them to tasks over which they have little control are at greater risk of falling into the precariat." "Another group linked to the precariat is the growing army in call centres." "Then there are interns...internships are potentially a vehicle for channelling youths into the precariat" (Standing, 2011, pp.14, 15, 16). Add the case he cites of a woman social worker on a £28,000 salary, who was denied promotion and told no post was available who was doing lots of work in her own time: "This woman is linked to the precariat by lack of progression and her appreciation of it" (Standing, 2011, p.20). For good measure, throw in those working in "Export Processing Zones in Malaysia" where the workforce is "not a proletariat being formed but a temporary precarious labour force", apparently by virtue simply of their hideous working conditions (Standing, 2011, pp.105-6). The hundreds of millions of migrant labourers in China are also subsumed into the precariat (Standing, 2011, pp.106-107).

It might reasonably be asked whether these disparate groups have more in common with one another, in terms of interests or capacities, than sets them apart from traditional proletarians. When membership of the precariat can hinge upon having tasks allocated to one with little control, which, almost by definition, is the condition of most employees, we should question whether the boundaries of the precariat are at all meaningful.

In the hands of Standing's followers, this approach has led to any number of odd claims. A recent book chapter by two such authors bluntly asserts: "In the UK, almost two out of three women belong to the precariat, and only one-third of men find themselves in a precarious position." It turns out that they "have simply counted those who are (1) unemployed, (2) have fixed-term labour contracts, or (3) have a part-time job" (Melin and Blom, 2015, pp.33-34).

The vagueness of the boundaries of the precariat is exacerbated by Standing's focus on feelings rather than data. As Hazel Conley writes, "Standing seemingly has a 'hotline' to the collective psyche of the precariat", describing how he believes it collectively feels about occupational obsolescence, the labour community, wage flexibility or sexual diversity, substituting this for "primary data or substantial secondary data" (Conley, 2012, p.687).

2.5 Beyond the precariat

Given the weaknesses of Standing's approach, three broad alternative approaches to precarity have developed. Each of these detaches the *concept* from the *class*: precarity without the precariat. The first is to return to the autonomist perspective on precarity already discussed in sections 2.3 and at the beginning of section 2.4, which, as noted above, sees precarity as not simply a negative phenomenon but also as a potentially liberatory force.

A second alternative envisages precarity as an all-pervasive, existential condition. Consider, for example, a recent round-table discussion on the subject overseen by Jasbir Puar (2012) and published in *The Drama Review*. The first participant, political scientist Isabell Lorey, proclaims:

[S]elf-precariation of cultural producers has become a normal way of living and working in neoliberal societies...precariation designates not only working and living conditions but also ways of subjectivisation, embodiment, and therefore agency... I use the term "precarity"...as a category of order that denotes social positionings of insecurity and hierarchisation, which accompanies the processes of Othering.

The second contributor, English professor Lauren Berlant, lists a series of states described by the term precarity, including: “an existential problem...we are all contingent beings...”, an “ongoing...economic problem...capitalist forms of labour make bodies and minds precarious”, and “a way to recognise and organise...ongoing class/group antagonisms/nostalgias/demands”. In the discussion, Judith Butler, argues:

Precarisation allows us to think about the slow death that happens to targeted or neglected populations over time and space. And it is surely a form of power without a subject, which is to say that there is no one centre that propels its direction and destruction... My point is not to rehabilitate humanism, but rather to struggle for a conception of ethical obligation that is grounded in precarity. No one escapes the precarious dimension of social life—it is, we might say, our common non-foundation (Puar, 2012).

Butler’s presence is justified, according to the organiser, because of her book *Precarious Life* (Butler, 2004; Puar, 2012, p.163). However, this collection of essays, written in the wake of the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks on the US, is above all else about the precariousness of human life and the responses to those attacks in the West. It does not purport to offer an insight into labour conditions in the developed countries. It is hard to envisage any coherent concept of precariat emerging here—and indeed it does not.

Such blurring of lines is not accidental. Brett Neilson and Ned Rossiter (2008, p.52) note that, even prior to academic interest in precarity, at its most ambitious “it would encompass not only the condition of precarious workers but a more general existential state”. They too seek “a possible convergence between precarity at work and the ontological precariousness that Butler...associates with the vulnerability and susceptibility to injury of the human animal” (Neilson and Rossiter, 2008, p.58). In this approach, the limited empirical evidence is not mourned but celebrated:

The last thing we want to do is to sociologise precarity... We might as well say that precarity cannot be grounded. In other words, precarity is not an empirical object that can be presupposed as stable and contained. It might better be understood as an experience... Insofar as we are precarious, we are always on the move (Neilson and Rossiter, 2008, p.63).

Once understood in this way, precarity is both all-pervasive and irrefutable by evidence.

A third way of moving on from Standing’s concept of the precarity involves identifying employment precarity as affecting certain categories of workers without necessarily generating a new and distinctive class. This is in fact the approach taken in section 3.3, below, where a parsimonious definition of precarity is offered. Perhaps the best-known attempt to proceed down this path is in the work of Arne Kalleberg, a US-based

sociologist. Kalleberg's (2011, p.1) account of the forces driving the evolution of the labour force in the US reads like a compendium of the views surveyed in this chapter thus far:

Globalisation and deregulation have increased the amount of competition faced by American companies... The growth of a "new economy" characterised by more knowledge-intensive work has been accompanied by the accelerated pace of technological innovation and the continued expansion of service industries... Ideological changes have supported these structural changes, with shifts towards greater individualism... These social, political and economic forces....have led to pervasive job insecurity... The growing gap between "good" and "bad" jobs represents a dark side to the booming American economy of the 1980s and 1990s.

As with Standing, a picture is presented of a post-war labour market, from 1945 to the 1970s, in which growth is premised on stability of employment, a "social contract between capital and labour existed" and, at least in some large firms, unions that helped "keep corporations in check" (Kalleberg, 2011, pp.22-23). Kalleberg adopts the notion, described by Karl Polanyi ([1944] 2001) in his *The Great Transformation*, of a "double movement". Polanyi (2001, p.79) argues that the industrial societies that emerged in the 19th century featured a combination of "the extension of market organisation" alongside "powerful institutions designed to check the action of markets relative to labour, land and money". However, in place of Polanyi's subtle discussion of the interaction of these organisational principles, in Kalleberg (2011, p.25) there is a far simpler version in which there is a "pendulum-like 'double movement' between flexibility and security over the past two centuries". As will be shown in chapter 8 this concept of a *reversion* to a pre-1929 variant of capitalism, even if only conceived as a rough sketch of real historical developments, cannot do justice to the contradictory requirements of capital or the role of the state from the 1980s onward.

Kalleberg also situates his account in relation to dual labour market theory, which is discussed in more detail in section 2.6 below. He writes that traditional dual labour market theory posits that "various dimensions of job rewards cohere together into clusters of good jobs and bad jobs," forming, respectively, the primarily and secondary labour markets (Kalleberg, 2011, p.11). In fact Kalleberg (2011, p.12) claims that "interrelations among dimensions of job rewards have loosened over time". Although he continues to write of a "duality between the primary and secondary labour markets" and a "dualistic labour market" (Kalleberg, 2011, pp.14, 57), Kalleberg (2009) himself acknowledges that labour markets cannot be, at least in the present period, demarcated into primary and secondary sectors according to precarity, which helps to justify the

decision, taken in chapter 3 below, to distinguish precarity from other negative characteristics of jobs.

Kalleberg (2011, p.85) argues that the strengthening of market-mediated relations has led to precarity and insecurity becoming pervasive *across* the labour force, resurrecting forms of employment that “were common prior to the institutionalisation of social protections enacted during the New Deal in the 1930s”. Kalleberg presents several pieces of evidence. The first, the rise of non-standard employment, is somewhat belied by the figures offered. He notes that from 1995 to 2005, with the exception of a rise in independent contractors (who are mostly self-employed), the trend in absolute numbers “appears to be relatively flat” (Kalleberg, 2011, p.90). As a proportion of the US workforce it fell. Furthermore, while an increase may have taken place before 1995, Kalleberg (2011, p.90) acknowledges that temporary workers remain “a relatively small portion of the overall labour force”. The low level of non-standard employment is taken to be a sign of the weak employment protection on offer in the US, and similar economies such as the UK, a point also made by Castells and discussed further in the following chapter.

The second piece of evidence is a decline in employer-employee attachment, measurable through job tenure. Kalleberg (2011, p.92) acknowledges that “employee tenure has remained relatively constant since the early 1970s,” though he also argues that there are discrepancies for particular groups such as less-educated men, long-tenure white men, black people and young adults generally. The use of tenure to measure levels of precarity in the UK is discussed at length in section 3.4.

A third piece of evidence is the weakening of firm internal labour markets. However, if it is true that firms pay less attention to their internal labour market, then moves between employers should be more frequent and this ought to be reflected in declining tenure of employment. The fourth indicator of precarity is the level of involuntary job losses. In the US case there is some evidence that, although this was and is a counter-cyclical phenomenon, involuntary job terminations increased in periods of expansion from the 1990s and became more pervasive for white collar workers. Whether this is the case for the UK is considered in chapter 7. The fifth item in Kalleberg’s list is the spread of long-term unemployment. However, his claim that the share of unemployment that is long-term has “increased enormously since the 2000” is misleading (Kalleberg, 2011, p.98). The year 2000 was close to a trough in this data—the proportion was higher in the mid to late 1990s—and the sharp rise in recent years seems to be the result of the impact of the 2008-9 recession, rather than a secular trend (Kosanovich and Sherman, 2015, p.2). Finally, there is the question of “perceived job insecurity” (Kalleberg, 2011, p.99). Kalleberg finds that the trend is for insecurity to *fall* from 1977 to 2006. He then corrects this by “controlling for the unemployment rate”, which he notes was high in the early 1980s (Kalleberg, 2011, p.100). However, it is not clear why this procedure is legitimate.

Why ask, counterfactually, what the level of insecurity would have been had unemployment been constant, when, in reality, unemployment is not constant?

In many ways Kalleberg's work is a welcome turn away from the sweeping claims of the theorists of transformation. Indeed, elsewhere he has offered some brief proposals to operationalise a measure of precarity, which will be included in the discussion in the following chapter (Kalleberg, 2014). Yet even in Kalleberg's work there are discrepancies between the account of changes in employment relations in the US and the much weaker evidence he sets out. This highlights both the need for further empirical investigation and potentially for theoretical innovation that can make sense of labour markets and the contradictory tendencies that appear to be at work in their evolution.

2.6 Dual labour markets, segmentation and flexibility

Debates about precarity often overlap with discussions of dual or segmented labour market theory. This has been seen explicitly in the case of the work of Kalleberg, though, as noted, he is sceptical about the alignment of primary and secondary labour markets with precarious and non-precarious employment respectively. More generally, the analysis of Guy Standing, and many of the other authors described in this chapter, could easily be subsumed into dual labour markets as theorised in Peter Doeringer and Michael Piore's (1970, pp.271-272) seminal work:

Jobs in the primary market possess several of the following characteristics: high wages, good working conditions, employment stability, chances of advancement, and equity and due process in the administration of work rules. Jobs in the secondary market, in contrast, tend to have low wages and fringe benefits, poor working conditions, high labour turnover, little chance of advancement, and often arbitrary and capricious supervision. There are distinctions between workers in the two sectors which parallel those between jobs: workers in the secondary sector tend, relative to those in the primary sector, to exhibit greater turnover, higher rates of lateness and absenteeism, to be insubordinate more often, and to engage more freely in petty theft and pilferage.

Here different rates of labour turnover are explicitly linked to the two different labour market sectors. However, when considering parallels with later authors, it is worth noting that this work by Doeringer and Piore pre-dates the turn to neoliberalism and therefore cannot be considered a *consequence* of the changing economic climate in recent decades. Instead, for the originators of the theory, as Ben Fine (1998, p.121) notes, the distinction between labour market sectors originates from imperfections within labour market and markets more generally. On the one hand, labour market institutions emerge to minimise

the uncertainty in the supply of labour for both workers and managers; on the other hand, fluctuations in the market due to business cycles necessitate a flexible component to the labour force. According to the theory, given the different requirements of the different sectors, employers in the secondary labour market will tend to attract workers who are considered marginal, such as women or ethnic minorities (Blackburn and Mann, 1979, p.23).

There are two readily apparent, and interrelated, issues that dual labour market theory must address. The first is the potential for movement between the two sectors of the labour market; the second is that a set of clear criteria must allow a primary and secondary labour market to be delimited in a meaningful manner.

On the first point, Doeringer and Piore (1970, p.278) imply that a range of factors—for instance, levels of economic growth, educational strategies or policies designed to mitigate discrimination—can determine whether secondary labour market workers are gradually integrated into the primary labour market or not. This suggests that, for them, the division between the labour markets may not be as stark as that suggested by writers on precarity such as Standing, for whom the division ossifies into a *class* distinction.

However, it is the second point that has proved especially problematic for dual labour market theory. As Kevin Doogan (2015, p.53) points out, “In dual labour market theory it is difficult to identify what is unique to the primary sector as a whole that distinguishes it from the secondary.” For Doeringer and Piore (1970, pp.274-275) the secondary labour market is closely associated with an absence of “internal labour markets”, in which labour is distributed and redistributed within organisations, rather than through market interactions, with a clear system of promotions and rewards. Blackburn and Mann (1979, pp.26-27) point to a number of difficulties with this association between primary labour markets and internal labour markets. First, there are pronounced differences in the degree to which internal labour markets are developed—with US manufacturing firms, for instance, tending to show higher levels of internal labour market development than their European counterparts. Second, the evidence even in the US is that external labour markets were generally as important as internal for the progression of workers in the labour market. Furthermore, “in the overall market the internal and external elements may cross-cut each other. All firms contain some ‘bad’ jobs, even if the firm is itself in the primary sector”.

In practice, the application of dual labour market theory has been rather more arbitrary, encompassing any form of job segregation regardless of whether it is linked to the presence or absence of internal labour markets. The difficulty is that, given the range of factors that can divide the primary from the secondary labour market, there will always be additional divisions that can add new segments to the labour market. Furthermore,

even if there is segregation at the extremes of the labour market, there will always be a substantial “middle” where “there is considerable overlap” (Blackburn and Mann, 1979, p.28). In this context, the lumping together of different characteristics inevitably leads to a situation in which “dualism gives way to threefold stratification, which also suggests that, in the absence of unifying labour market characteristics, aggregation into sectors let alone classes is unstable” (Doogan, 2015, p.53). There are also problems identifying the processes that might consolidate the core. As Pollert (1991a, p.15) points out, many of the measures taken by the UK government under Margaret Thatcher could be interpreted as weakening the bargaining capacity of “core” workers in manufacturing, “the opposite of what one would expect if state policy aimed to reinforce the employment and organisational rights of a core workforce”.

Faced with these challenges, dual labour market theory has tended to give way to a more fine-grained division of labour market. This is the case even for Piore, who by 1975 was proposing that the primary sector “may more usefully be thought of as consisting of an upper and lower tier” with employees in the former exhibiting higher degrees of control of the job and educational levels and the latter consisting of relatively well-paid blue-collar roles (Harrison and Sum, 1979, p.689). A little later, Albert Mok was proposing a four-segment labour market, with internal and external labour markets each divided into primary and secondary components (Loveridge and Mok, 1980). It is a small step, then, from dual to segmented labour market theories, which, at first glance, exhibit a greater appearance of realism. The most sophisticated version is what Ben Fine (1998, p.125) identifies as the Cambridge school of segmented labour market theory, which “differs from the neoclassical orthodoxy in its supply and demand analysis by extending the scope of what constitutes factors forming supply and demand and by rejecting equilibrium”. Fine (1998, pp.125-126) adds that this school distinguishes itself from earlier segmented labour market analyses by “emphasising the role that labour itself plays in the creation of labour market segments and the conditions within them”.

However, the very range of factors included in this approach to segmentation can lead to rather *ad hoc* determinations of segments, which are shaped by a large number of different factors, each requiring their own theoretical apparatus, such as state intervention, social reproduction, the presence or otherwise of trade unions, and so on, if they are to be explained. Fine (1998, p.128) argues that the approach tends to make a “strong and immediate identification of the theoretical categories and analysis with empirical observation”, contrasting this with a Marxist approach to the relationship between theory and history that relies on “the study of contradictory social forces and tendencies whose interactions give rise to outcomes understood, but not predetermined, at a more complex and concrete level of analysis”. This is true of segmented labour market theory more generally. Even proponents of the theory could write in 1985:

For several reasons, current segmentation theory is best seen as a middle-range conceptualisation in the field of stratification. It has developed inductively as a set of generalisations based on research findings and specific criticisms of existing social policies. Larger paradigms such as Marxism or structural-functionalism, and previous research traditions such as institutional economics, are called upon for conceptual support or employed in theoretical dispute. However, current segmentation perspectives are neither entailed by nor uniquely claimed by these larger traditions (Apostle et al, 1985, p.31).

The issue here is not with the conception of what Fine (1998, p.129) calls “a set of structured and overlapping labour markets” as such, especially given the distance between this view and the simplistic distinctions proposed by dual labour market theory; rather, it is with the unsystematic nature of the theoretical elements out of which the theory of the Cambridge school of segmented labour markets is formed. In segmented labour market theory more generally, matters are even worse, with authors variously designating 16-fold or three-fold segmentations, in largely statistical exercises that often stop at the level of description while offering little by way of causative drives or explanations (see Fine, 1998, pp.138-139). In chapter 8, reflecting on the question of precarity, an attempt will be made to conceptualise labour market structuring within a broader political economy of capitalism, the theory of which is built, as Fine suggests, through processes of rising from abstract tendencies at work within capitalism to the concrete surface appearance of labour markets.

Closely linked to the concept of dual labour markets is the notion of the flexible firm associated with John Atkinson (1984) and, again, with Piore, this time collaborating with Charles Sabel (Piore and Sabel, 1984). In this view, economic and technological instability and uncertainty necessitate “functional flexibility”, in which employees can be redeployed to carry out a range of tasks; “numerical flexibility”, in which the size of the workforce could be rapidly altered; and “financial flexibility”, which is both achieved by and reinforces the other forms of flexibility. This model, again, implies a division into a core of functionally flexible employees in stable jobs and a periphery of disposable, numerically flexible workers who could easily be replaced from external labour markets, with the division into the two groups now enacted primarily at firm level.

This vision of contemporary employment has been questioned on several grounds. Colin Williams (2007, pp.145-150) argues that the strict division into unflexible “Fordist” and flexible “post-Fordist” forms, and the treatment of the relationship of the two as a historical sequences does not bear critical scrutiny. This is so both because Fordism was never universal and there is little evidence, at least on a global scale, that the forms of mass production it characterised are disappearing—indeed many of the managerial practices of Fordism now extend beyond the manufacturing sector, for instance into retail

or the public sector. Furthermore, Williams (2007, p.149) claims that the signifiers of flexible employment required by the Atkinson model of work are simply not present in the countries such as the UK: “The permanent job remains very much the overwhelming norm...if anything, flexible jobs are becoming less rather than more numerous.”

Pollert (1988) argues that what was perceived as a shift in firm structure in the UK was often simply a reflection of sectoral shifts, with a decline in large manufacturing firms and a growth of large service sector firms, which are inherently structured along different lines. Like Williams, Pollert claims that the emergence of a peripheral labour force is not reflected in the aggregate data. She adds that the Atkinson model also suffers all the problems of the distinction between core and periphery encountered in “simplistic” forms of dual labour market theory—including the vagueness of its categories and the criteria according to which people are allocated into one or the other group.

More generally, Ben Fine writes of the mainstream flexibility narrative, that it has

simply served both as a terminological device for arranging a chaotic array of empirical material and as a means to replicate theoretical debates over how the economy works without adding any new analytical content... [W]hilst there have been empirical changes to capitalism since the breakdown of the post-war boom, and these have eventually prompted the notion of flexibility by way of analytical, empirical and policy responses, it is a concept that is totally inadequate in its theoretical and empirical content to deal with the task with which it has been confronted (Fine, 1998, p.77).

Similarly, Pollert (1991a, p.7) notes the impressionism of many approaches to flexibility, which encounter a range of different supposed manifestations of the context, in different economies, which are then shoehorned into this singular category.

Again, the question of what theoretical approaches can better offer insights into the problem of precarity will be addressed in chapter 8.

2.7 Summary

There are a number of claims made by the bodies of literature examined here, and many ways of conceptualising precarity and insecurity. Some, such as Hardt and Negri’s portrait of the emergent multitude or Standing’s precariat, have been questioned on theoretical grounds. In other cases, the empirical claims offered have been shown to be suspect.

Nonetheless, the theories covered in this chapter are, when taken together, suggestive of a transformation of work that has rendered the employment relation more contingent, often dovetailing with concepts of flexibility and of dual labour markets examined in

section 2.6. Furthermore, they have contributed to an ideological climate, especially on the radical left, where it is often assumed such change has taken place. The claims deserve to be tested empirically, even if some of the more outlandish quantitative claims of the theorists of transformation have already shown to be at odds with the data.

This is particularly true because, as chapters 3 and 4 demonstrate, the more critical and cautious approaches offered within the sociology of work and related disciplines often share the assumptions of growing precarity and insecurity—sometimes drawing explicitly on the theorists of transformation. The subsequent chapter will attempt to take up the challenge suggested by Kalleberg's work of attempting to arrive at an operationalisable definition of precarity, which will allow an empirical examination of its extent.

3 Perspectives on precarity

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter focused on “grand narratives” of the transformation of work and the working class. In these narratives, employment is seen as increasingly contingent and workers increasingly insecure. The aim here is to see how the theme of precarity has been explored within the sociology of work, employment relations theory, labour economics and related disciplines. This begins, in section 3.2, with an analysis of journal articles in these disciplines utilising the term *precarity*.

While the literature examined here pays greater attention to grounding its insights empirically, and is generally far more cautious in its claims, it has nonetheless developed in the context of the discussions initiated by the theorists of transformation. Particular care will therefore be taken to show where the academic literature adopts, explicitly or implicitly, the type of perspectives outlined in chapter 2.

One problem that emerges quite rapidly is that precarity is not always defined in the literature and, where it is, there is no consistency as to how it is defined. As a result of the analysis here, a parsimonious definition of precarity is derived and justified in section 3.3. This definition, along with that of *insecurity*, developed in the subsequent chapter, informs the analytical work that follows. In addition, a proposition of growing precarity is outlined, which can be operationalised through two subsidiary propositions: one of declining employment tenure and one of the increasing usage of certain forms of non-standard employment.

Sections 3.4 and 3.5 consider prior studies of employment tenure and de-standardisation in the UK. These accounts are even more measured, as a result of being more tightly bound to the aggregate data, suggesting a more staid picture of the development of precarity in employment in the UK and motivating the original analysis of precarity offered in chapters 6 and 7. As will become clear, the closer one gets to the data, the more difficult it is to justify the sweeping claims of the theorists of transformation.

3.2 Visions of precarity

Although a recent addition to the English lexicon, a search of the Summon database provided by Middlesex University produces 2,319 accessible journal articles containing the term *precarity*. In order to make the survey manageable and concentrate on the most widely cited conceptions, this is focused down to English-language journals that have a three or four star rating in the “Human Resource Management and Employment Studies” category of the Association of Business Schools directory in at least one of its three most

recent iterations: 2009, 2010 and 2015. The full list of such journals that include at least one significant mention of *precarity* is given in table 3.1. Many articles use the term only in passing or in the context of brief book reviews, and these are excluded from the survey. *Work, Employment & Society*, one of the most prestigious journals of the sociology of work, is notable for the attention it has paid to precarity, and the bulk of sources considered below come from this journal.

There are two tensions within this body of literature that make it especially hard to derive a clear definition of precarity. The first, already discussed in chapter 2, is that there is a pull between precarity conceived of in a narrow sense, focusing on employment relations, and precarity conceived of in broader terms—to describe poverty, the absence of welfare provision or an existential condition.

The second tension is between accounts that seek to generalise about the labour force at large and those focused on narrow sections of the labour force and the specific issues they face. For instance, McDowell, Rootham and Hardgrove (2014) study young South Asian men in Luton; Umney and Kretsos (2015) consider “early career jazz musicians in London”; Ahmad (2008) looks at “illegal” migrant workers in London; Potter and Hamilton (2014) focus on mushroom pickers in Northern Ireland; Bergvall-Kåreborn and Howcroft (2013) examine mobile application developers. These groups are hardly representative of the workforce as a whole. Moreover, many of these studies are qualitative rather than quantitative and therefore do not directly address the kind of questions posed by this thesis, crucially the question of whether precarity has become more prevalent in the UK.

The narrow case studies coexist with other accounts that do emphasise the growth of a generalised condition, emerging in the advanced capitalist economies over recent decades. So Kalleberg (2013, p.897), who is discussed at greater length in section 2.5, above, writes in a response to a symposium on his 2011 book, *Good Jobs, Bad Jobs*:

I make the case that there has been a general increase...in precarious work and job insecurity, though some...are more vulnerable to precarious work than others. Empirical support for this is also admittedly somewhat speculative, owing to the paucity of consistent measures that are available for broad samples since the 1970s.

In another article he argues, “The spread of the neoliberal revolution generated precarious work in both the Global North and Global South,” while he also notes that “the impacts of macrostructural influences on job quality and precarious work were mediated in important ways by national institutions and cultural processes” (Kalleberg, 2012b, p.439). An editorial in *Work, Employment & Society*, surveying the terrain since the journal launched in 1987, similarly claims:

[I]nsecurity at work has increased, reflected in growing attention to gender and racial discrimination, the exploitation of migrant labour and the precarity of employment. New forms of work have proliferated in the western economies... Temporary contracts, part-time and agency work are different from each other but taken together illustrate the extent of the move away from the standard employment relationship and the diminishing power of workers (Beck et al, 2016, pp.212-214).

Table 3.1: Precarity in selected journals

| Journal | Mentions of <i>precarity</i> |
|--|---|
| <i>Work, Employment & Society</i> | 31 |
| <i>Work & Occupations</i> | 10 |
| <i>International Labour Review</i> | 7 |
| <i>Industrial Relations Journal</i> | 4 |
| <i>Economic & Industrial Democracy</i> | 4 |
| <i>Human Resource Management Journal</i> | 2 |
| <i>The British Journal of Industrial Relations</i> | 2 |
| <i>European Journal of Industrial Relations</i> | 2 |
| <i>Gender, Work & Organisation</i> | 2 |
| <i>New Technology, Work & Employment</i> | 1 |
| <i>Industrial & Labor Relations Review</i> | 1 |

Surprisingly, given the novelty of the term, few authors included in this survey offer any substantive definition of precarity. On noteworthy exception is Prosser (2016), in the context of a study of precarious work in eight European countries. Prosser (2016, p.950), who uses the terms *precarity* and *precarious work* interchangeably, writes, “Precarious work is defined as employment involving contractual insecurity; weakened employment security for permanent workers and non-standard contractual forms such as temporary agency, fixed-term, zero-hour and undeclared work are all included in this definition.” Contrasting his view with that of other theorists such as Guy Standing, who incorporate “indicators related to pay, unemployment, social security and employee voice”, Prosser argues:

[W]e find a more parsimonious definition desirable and conceive of “outsiders” only as employees on non-standard contracts. Not only will such a designation allow us to compare trends across eight countries more economically, but also to avoid the charge of definitional vagueness that has been levelled at certain accounts (Prosser, 2016, p.952).

Prosser's advice, to seek a more parsimonious definition that can be operationalised in empirical studies, is followed here, although for reasons explored below the definition offered is broader than one simply referring to the extent of non-standard employment.

While Prosser finds evidence, based on his definitions, for an expansion of precarious work in Europe, with a rise in involuntary temporary and part-time working, different factors are at play in different contexts. Prosser distinguishes between "liberalisation", in which the workforce as a whole experiences deregulation, and "dualisation", in which a section of the workforce is rendered more precarious. The "Anglophone" countries studied, Ireland and the UK, show a distinctive pattern:

More limited deregulatory drivers of precarious work were discovered in these countries, a puzzling finding given the reputation of Ireland and the UK for generally liberalised employment protection. The fact that significant pressures for catholic deregulation were not found...reflects, we suggest, that deregulation was implemented earlier in these countries and is thus especially rooted in their business systems... The UK is notable for its apparent stability. No factors emerged as particularly forceful drivers of precarity in the country, a finding which, notwithstanding concerns about the effects of recent austerity measures...suggests a comparatively steady labour market regime (Prosser, 2016, pp.962-963).

The need to distinguish between situations in which non-standard contracts are used to engender precarity and situations in which employment protections for "standard" contacts are liberalised suggests that the increased use of non-standard contracts is insufficient to determine whether precarity is growing. Indeed, the UK has been seen as the "exemplary case" combining low levels of use of fixed-term contracts with weak employment protection for those in permanent employment (Gumbrell-McCormick, 2011, p.296). Following Castells (2000a, p.285) and Kalleberg (2011, pp.91-92), job tenure will be used as an alternative indicator of the contingent nature of employment under conditions of general liberalisation.

The notion of precarity involving shorter-term, more contingent and fluid engagement between workers and their employers is common in much of the literature. So Greer (2016, p.167), in the context of a discussion of the use of labour market policies to intensify market discipline in the workplace, writes:

The literature on precarity is the terrain on which re-commodification has to be understood, since the "precariat" is the group most vulnerable to welfare reforms. It faces, by definition, chronic job and income insecurity, weak welfare entitlements and a back-and-forth motion between employment and unemployment statuses.

Here rapid movement into and out of employment is seen as intrinsic to the definition, along with other factors—though there is no mention here of non-standard forms of employment.

McDowell, Rootham and Hardgove (2014) also focus on the contingent nature of employment. They write of the 18 young south Asian men from Luton interviewed in their article:

All 18 men had employment careers that might be defined as precarious, in the sense that across their relatively short working lives...they had held considerable numbers of jobs, typically on a casual basis, usually on a temporary contract, and were poorly paid (McDowell et al, 2014, p.854).

This passage implies an emphasis on both the short tenure of employment and non-standard employment contracts. These authors draw explicitly on Standing, though noting the “largely rhetorical” aspect of his work (McDowell et al, 2014, p.851). A second influence is Leah Vosko, who develops a similar account of precarious employment to that of Standing, writing in a report co-authored with Andrea Noack:

We conceptualise precarious jobs as forms of work for remuneration which have one or more dimensions of labour market insecurity that make them substantially different from the “functions” of the SER [standard employment relation]—specifically, its association with access to training, regulatory protections and social benefits, decent wages, and a social wage. In particular, precarious jobs are characterised typically by high levels of uncertainty, low income, a lack of control over the labour process, and limited access to regulatory protections. The presence of one or more of these dimensions of labour market insecurity results in these jobs being of undesirable quality (Noack and Vosko, 2011, p.3).

A third influence cited by McDowell, Rootham and Hardgove (2014) is Bridget Anderson (2010), whose work charts the link between immigration controls and the creation of a precarious labour force. Anderson in turn draws on Gerry Rogers (1989, p.3), who writes:

The concept of precariousness involves instability, lack of protection, insecurity and social or economic vulnerability... It is some combination of these factors which identifies precarious jobs, and the boundaries around the concept are inevitably to some extent arbitrary.

In similar terms Anderson (2010, p.303) argues:

There is a danger that the term can become a catchall, meaning everything and nothing at the same time, but unlike “flexibility” it does capture notions of the flux and uncertainty for certain groups of

workers (not only or even principally migrants) that are held by many to be an aspect of the “new economy”.

The term *precarity* is, for Anderson, also preferred over *vulnerability*, which is “more often used in the UK”, as the latter risks “naturalising these conditions and confining those workers so affected to victimhood. Moreover, unlike ‘vulnerability’ the notion of ‘precarity’ captures both atypical and insecure employment and has implications beyond employment pointing to an associated weakening of social relations.” In addition, she notes that an “interest in precarity has tended to go hand in hand with anxieties about the ‘new age of insecurity’ as depicted by theorists such as [Richard] Sennett (1998) and [Ulrich] Beck (1992)”, forming a bridge between this body of work and some of the theorists of transformation discussed in section 2.2 above (Anderson, 2010, p.303).

Rogers (1989) is also influential on the definitions used by another recent article, by De Vilhena and others (2016). These authors too detect a growing precariousness through the neoliberal period and seek to investigate the impact of adult education through a comparison of the UK, Spain and Russia. They instrumentalise their definitions “firstly in terms of job security and secondly as working full time and receiving wages above working poor levels” (De Vilhena et al, 2016, p.99). In practice this means:

The definition of non-precarious job in terms of organisational and economic aspects is the same for the three countries: non-precarious jobs are those that are both full time and with wages above working poor level... The measurement of the dependent variable in terms of temporal and social aspects was not identical in all countries because the available information differs from survey to survey... For the UK, non-precarious jobs are those where the individual has an indefinite contract (excluding zero-hour contracts) (Vono de Vilhena et al, 2016, p.102).

This seems to set the bar for non-precarious jobs quite high, potentially conflating factors driven by different forces and exhibiting different patterns. The inclusion of part-time jobs in the category is, they claim, justified because such jobs are “extensively used as an indicator of ‘atypical’ or ‘non-standard’ employment”, a circular argument, and because “in most countries” they tend to concentrate “lower positions in the occupational hierarchy” and “inferior employment conditions” (De Vilhena et al, 2016, p.114). In practice this further adds to the factors that might lead someone to be precarious.

Another paper that draws on Standing’s concepts, while also noting various critiques, is Potter and Hamilton’s (2014) study of mushroom pickers. Their response to the criticism of Standing is precisely to broaden the conception of precarity, in their case by including residency status:

Standing's response is that the critiques have focused only on employment insecurity, not the wider understanding of precarity brought about by multiple factors. The theoretical understanding that underpins the analysis in this paper is that precarity based on residency status makes people vulnerable to precarious employment (Potter and Hamilton, 2014, pp.391-392; see also Standing, 2012).

A more uncritical application of Standing's concepts can be found in the study by Hopkins (2014) of absence rates among different groups of precarious workers in food manufacturing workplaces in the UK. In practice here precarity is identified with a range of non-standard contracts with differing perceived "levels" of precariousness.

By contrast, Ahmad's (2008) study of migrant workers in London draws not on Standing but on the autonomist conception of precarity offered by Alex Foti (2004) and Mitropoulos (2006). Citing the latter, Ahmad (2008, p.303) writes, "Although there are few clear, concise definitions in circulation, its significance is generally understood to lie in 'being continually available for work, to regard life outside waged work as a time of preparation for and readiness to work'."

Finally, Bergvall-Kåreborn and Howcroft's (2013) study of software developers for mobile platforms, offers this conception of precarity:

Workers move rapidly between different types of employment—freelancing, working for a company, setting up their own business—not necessarily sequentially and often in parallel... While new media workers may be celebrated as "model entrepreneurs"...often the reality is the disintegration of stable careers and discontinuous employment (Bergvall-Kåreborn and Howcroft, 2013, p.966).

Along with the brevity of employment, often workers will face self-employment and freelancing for the firms for which they perform work: "Fluidity is key, so that while workers may sit in a particular category at any given career point, they are inclined (and often forced) to adapt" (Bergvall-Kåreborn and Howcroft, 2013, p.967).

3.3 Towards a definition of precarity

It is clear from the disparate accounts of precarity outlined above that choices must be made in forming a definition. Better, then, that these choices be explicit. Figure 3.1 offers a conceptual mapping of the choices made here.

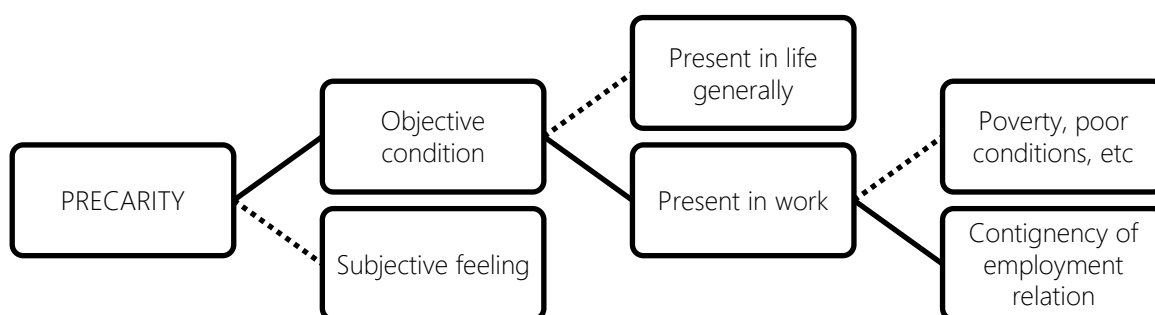
The solid lines in the diagram denote the choices made. First, precarity is defined as an objective condition. This usefully distinguishes it from *insecurity*, which is considered below, where it will be treated there as a subjective counterpart to precarity. Second, precarity is focused on the world of work. While many authors would prefer to make it an

existential condition, more in the spirit of its early usage in French sociology, there are good reasons to focus on employment. This strategy allows a meaningful measure of precarity, which can have some bearing on the debates about the changes to work and employment over recent decades. More importantly it reflects a central preoccupation in this thesis: the objective capacity of workers *as workers* to resist the encroachments of capital. Here Armano and Murgia (2017, p.48) introduce a useful terminological distinction between “employment precarity” and “‘precariousness’, a term which better describes an experiential state that permeates the entire lives of individuals”. While their interest is with the latter, the focus here is on the former.

The third choice made is that precarity is judged not to be simply a synonym for poverty, badly paid or low skilled work, or a description applied to those suffering abuse at the hands of unscrupulous employers, though of course it may overlap with such categories. Precarious jobs are not synonymous with what have been termed “bad jobs” (see, for instance, McGovern, Smeaton and Hill, 2004). For the term to have a *distinctive* meaning it must refer to the contingency of the employment relation itself.

This leads to a *proposition of growing precarity*: “Over the neoliberal period in the UK, the employment relationship has become, objectively, more contingent.” The term *proposition* is favoured over *hypothesis* as the latter suggests a positivist approach to the data leading to a binary outcome, whereas, as will become clear, the trends operating here are envisaged as abstract tendencies and counter-tendencies that together generate concrete and complex outcomes.

Figure 3.1: Conceptual mapping of precarity



The parsimonious definition offered here is consistent with much of the literature considered above, which tends to associate precarity empirically with what are seen as non-standard employment contracts (including temporary employment, agency work, zero-hours contracts and some forms of self-employment, but, as discussed below, not necessarily part-time employment) and/or with shorter periods of employment. The former introduces a potential for the employment relationship to be unilaterally ended more easily by the employer than would be the case with a permanent contract. The latter reflects that employment relations are being terminated after a shorter period, though it leaves open the question of which party is responsible for the termination. In order to instrumentalise this concept of precarity and to determine whether it has increased over the neoliberal period, both changes to employment contracts and the evolution of employment tenure must be explored. This answers the concern of Hazel Conley (2008, p.731), who argues: “One problem with relying on job tenure as a measure of labour market insecurity is that it misses the point that increased job tenure and high levels of temporary employment can exist in the same labour market.”

There are, then, two subsidiary propositions. First, a subsidiary *proposition of growing de-standardisation*: “Over the neoliberal period in the UK, there has been a growth and generalisation across the labour force of a range of non-standard forms of employment that make the employment relationship, objectively, more contingent.” Second, a subsidiary *proposition of declining employment tenure*: “Over the neoliberal period in the UK, there has been a secular decline in employment tenure.” These are tested in chapters 6 and 7 respectively. The remainder of this chapter considers prior empirical work in these two areas.

3.4 Job tenure

The definition of precarity offered above forces us to examine the changing tenure of employment. Here there is a body of empirical work dating back to the mid-1990s. As Simon Burgess and Hedley Rees (1996, p.334) point out, “Two of the most important aspects of a job are how much it pays and how long it is likely to last.” By the mid-1990s there had been plenty of studies of wages in the UK but there was “much less evidence on the evolution of job tenure” (Burgess and Rees, 1996, p.334; see also, Gregg and Wadsworth, 1995, p.73). Burgess and Rees were among the first authors to begin to rectify this, taking advantage of the growing body of data collected by the General Household Survey, conducted by the Office for National Statistics from 1971 until 2007. Prior to the mid-1990s, studies tend to look at a snapshot of the labour force rather than trying to trace a long-term pattern of change (see Burgess and Rees, 1996, p.335 for a summary of previous work).

3.4.1 *The classic studies*

Burgess and Rees seek to disentangle the cyclical and secular aspects of the evolution of job tenure. They point out that, perhaps counterintuitively, average job tenure tends to increase during recessions and decrease during booms (Burgess and Rees, 1996, p.334); in other words elapsed tenure is countercyclical. This is because, although involuntary job separations increase during recessions, voluntary separations decline as fewer people look to change jobs, preferring to hang on to the one that they have. The second factor generally outweighs the first. In addition, during a boom, people are freshly drawn into the labour market and necessarily begin with zero job tenure, lowering the average.

The main finding of Burgess and Rees (1996) is that from 1975 to 1992 mean elapsed tenure—the time employees report having been with their current employer—was quite stable. For women it was the same at the beginning and end of this period, with a slight rise and subsequent fall in between; for men it fell by about a year. The mean across the period was 6.6 years for women and 10.2 years for men. This implies that, in a steady state, women and men could expect to be in a single job for about 13.2 and 20.4 years respectively. As they predict, they detect a tendency for tenure to rise with recessions (1980-1, 1990-1) and fall as the economy recovers. The authors report:

There seems to be little evidence here to support the idea of a much more flexible workforce...over the 1980s. Certainly job tenure fell quite considerably between 1984 [when it peaked close to 11 years for men and just after the peak of around 7 years for women] and 1990 for both men and women (Burgess and Rees, 1996, pp.338-339).

However, at this stage the data did not exist to determine definitively if this fall was due to cyclical patterns or a secular trend. A separate paper, taking a snapshot of tenure in 1990, further demonstrates that there were then, just as there had been at least since 1975, lots of people with short jobs but also lots with “very long jobs”. The authors estimate that, among men, a “little over 40 percent were in jobs that would *eventually* last 20 years or more”, leading the authors to conclude that “the death of ‘jobs for life’” appears to be “exaggerated” (Rees and Burgess, 1997, p.237).

Burgess and Rees (1996) disaggregates the data into manufacturing and services sectors, by age, by qualifications and by earnings. Most groupings reflect the overall pattern of evolution of tenure for the workforce as a whole. One exception to the overall stability of tenure is a decline in the tenure of men aged 30 to 50 in the lowest earnings quartile across the period, a trend not apparent in any other earning group or among similarly low earning women. This seems to parallel the pattern found by Henry S Farber in the US case. Reflecting on the two decades from 1973, Farber (1995, pp.24-26) writes, “reports of the

death of 'the great American Job' are greatly exaggerated", with the big changes being the decline in long-term jobs for the "least educated (particularly men)" but also a substantial rise in long-term jobs among women outside this category.

Burgess and Rees follow up their 1996 paper with a second major study, two years later (Burgess and Rees, 1998). This new paper examines the evolution of job tenure over a slightly longer timescale, extending the analysis to 1993, and for more narrowly defined groups. This allows them to control for demographic and other changes to see if these mask a sharper shift in the pattern of tenures. For instance, if older people are likely to be in jobs for longer, the overall aging of the workforce could lead to a lengthening in average tenure, while in fact tenures were falling for each given grouping in the population.

The new paper again confirms the general picture of stability. For instance, the various age cohorts they study exhibit similar patterns in terms of the probability of them having a given job for less than one year or more than five years as they age. One exception is among men aged 25 born from 1961-1970, the youngest cohort (so their elapsed tenure was measured only in the years 1986-95), who have a slightly higher probability of being in a job for less than one year (Burgess and Rees, 1998, pp.634-635). It is possible that this reflects changes to the education system, such as the expansion of higher education, leading to an increase in newer entrants to the labour market around this age. Another interesting pattern is that recent cohorts of women in the 26-35 year range were more likely to hold a job for over five years.

Overall, they conclude:

[The results do not] betray any noticeable secular trend. There are no more men and women in jobs for less than a year in 1993 than there were in 1975. This conclusion holds after controlling for any changes in the composition of the working population by age, educational attainment, housing tenure, family formation and other factors, and also the unemployment rate (Burgess and Rees, 1998, p.641).

Contemporaneously with Burgess and Rees's papers, Paul Gregg and Jonathan Wadsworth (1995) sought to perform a similar analysis for 1975-93, this time using data from the Labour Force Survey. A second paper by the same authors extends the analysis to 2000, compares GHS and LFS data, and disaggregates the workforce in a similar manner to the 1998 Burgess and Rees paper (Gregg and Wadsworth, 2002). They suggest that, compared to the General Household Survey, the "LFS data allows a broader range of inquiry" (Gregg and Wadsworth, 1995, p.73). However, Burgess and Rees (1998, p.653) note the discrepancies between the two surveys are most pronounced between 1975 and the 1980s, cautioning that "the 1975 LFS is somewhat problematic as this was its first year of operation in the UK". Gregg and Wadsworth's (2002, p.132) general

recommendation, which influences the approach in chapter 7, is that researchers can “use the GHS to obtain the longest possible consistent series on job tenure, but that LFS, with the exception of 1975, should be used by anyone seeking to produce a more comprehensive study of the issues”.

Gregg and Wadsworth’s 1995 paper broadly agrees with Burgess and Rees on the overall evolution of tenure. They find that “tenure and security have changed only marginally for the majority”. However, they claim that “the minority who lose their job or who attempt to (re-)enter work face a labour market that is now dominated by part-time and temporary jobs” (Gregg and Wadsworth, 1995, p.73). Their argument is that, while full-time permanent work has probably not become more unstable, the prevalence of part-time and temporary contracts means that the labour market can appear “highly insecure and unstable” and that, in actuality, many of the badly paid, “untypical” jobs do not offer a route into stable, full-time work (Gregg and Wadsworth, 1993, p.86). To say that the labour market is “dominated” by non-standard work for new entrants is a strong claim and it will be considered in the analysis of de-standardisation of employment in chapter 6. A comparative study of four countries found some evidence that formerly unemployed workers are more likely to move into temporary work. However, the effect for the UK was found to be small and significant only at the 10 percent, not the 5 percent, level for the first two years out of unemployment; after four years there was no effect even at the 10 percent level (Dieckhoff, 2011, p.242).

Regarding the overall pattern, the LFS data does show a slightly more pronounced decline in tenure from 1975 to 1984 than Burgess and Rees’s analysis of the GHS data suggests. Gregg and Wadsworth use the median rather than the mean. They find that the median fell from 5.8 years to 5.0 years across the period. It kept falling, reaching 4.6 years in 1989, before rising again to 4.9 years in 1993. Nonetheless, 49.7 percent still had an elapsed tenure of five or more years by the end of the period, only slightly down from 53.5 percent at the beginning.

There are also gender differences. Across the period as a whole (1975-93), male elapsed tenure fell from a median of 7.9 years to 6.4 years, whereas the female median figure rose from 3.9 years to 4.3 years. One interesting shift picked up by the LFS data is that the drop in male tenure from 1975 to 1984 is largely a product of the fall in men who had been in their job for 20 or more years, which fell from 19.6 percent of men to 14.0 percent. This decline is concentrated “amongst older men” for whom the “chances of being in a job for more than ten years have fallen by around 15 percent points since 1985” (Gregg and Wadsworth, 2002, p.132).

In their second paper, Gregg and Wadsworth (2002) are more insistent on a long-term secular decline in tenure. They are able to extend the analysis over an additional economic

cycle and, again, the cyclical pattern of job tenure is apparent in both the LFS and GHS data. The exception to the secular decline is among women with dependent children. As the authors point out:

Maternity leave was introduced in Britain in 1979 and extended to cover more part-time workers and those with short job tenures in 1994...the proportion of women returning to the same employer after childbirth rose dramatically between 1979 and 1996 (Gregg and Wadsworth, 2002, p.118).

The idea that “falls in stability” across the wider workforce are “masked” by this rise in job stability is perhaps an odd way of putting it, given that women are half of the contemporary labour force (Gregg and Wadsworth, 2002, p.132).

The authors, joined by Giulia Faggio, return to the study of job tenure in a book chapter published almost a decade later as part of a collection looking at the British labour market (Gregg et al, 2011). Here, in contrast with the 2002 paper, they conclude that “job stability has neither risen nor fallen...since 1985” (Gregg et al, 2011, p.98). Indeed, the median tenure rose from a low point around 2002, and, interestingly, it continued rising up to the recession, and then even more so from 2008. This meant median elapsed tenure returned to just above five years, close to where it was at previous peaks. This aggregate stability again conceals a difference between men and women. The authors report that median “job tenure for men has fallen by around 18 months, down a third, since the mid-1980s” (Gregg et al, 2011, p.98). In this longer-term perspective it appears that male tenure stabilised in the late 1990s, with the sharp decline concentrated in mid-1990s. For women, tenure rose across the period. The authors conclude, “[T]here is little evidence of any secular change in the short-term job pattern for younger workers, or indeed any age group, over time. Nor does this basic pattern change if we disaggregate by age and qualifications” (Gregg et al, 2011, p.102).

3.4.2 Other studies of tenure

Aside from the classic papers by Gregg and Wadsworth and Burgess and Rees, there are relatively few studies of the aggregate patterns of job tenure for Britain, and it has not been possible to locate any with a similar degree of detail. This is unfortunate as the period after 2001 offers an additional business cycle leading up to the recession of 2008-9 as well as the subsequent recovery period, potentially adding substantially to our knowledge of the evolution of tenure. The analysis in chapter 7 will attempt to fill this gap.

That is not to say that tenure disappears entirely as a subject of interest. Claire Macaulay (2003) of the Office for National Statistics produced a study based on the LFS data, in this

case covering the period from 1996 to 2001. As well as using the LFS data, Macaulay deploys the New Earnings Survey Panel Dataset (NESP), the panel form of the New Earnings Survey. This consists of panel data on the earnings of individuals, reported by employers rather than employees. This is potentially more accurate, as it is less likely to be subject to recall bias. It also allows specific individuals to be tracked, as the same final two digits of the National Insurance number have been used consistently since 1975. The NESP, however, contains far less demographic or occupational data about individuals, and its coverage only includes those earning over the PAYE threshold and contributing tax, and may exclude those who are changing jobs if their records are not updated in time. In addition, the NESP asks whether employees have changed *jobs* (including within a given firm) whereas the LFS asks if employees have changed *employers*.

Table 3.2: Selected papers on the evolution of job tenure

| Paper | Data | Key findings |
|---------------------------|-------------------------|--|
| Burgess and Rees, 1996 | GHS, 1975-92 | Fairly stable mean tenure across the period, with "little evidence...to support the idea of a much more flexible workforce...over the 1980s". Low earning men aged 30-50 a possible exception. |
| Burgess and Rees, 1998 | GHS, 1975-93 | No "noticeable secular trend" across the period. |
| Gregg and Wadsworth, 1995 | LFS, 1975-93 | Job "tenure and security have changed only marginally for the majority". However, those losing their job face a labour market "dominated by part-time and temporary jobs". |
| Gregg and Wadsworth, 2002 | LFS and GHS, 1975-2000 | Some evidence of a long-term secular decline in tenure, especially among men, offset somewhat by rising tenure among women with children. |
| Gregg et al, 2011 | LFS 1985-2010 | Overall, "job stability has neither risen nor fallen...since 1985". Some decline among men and some rise among women across the period, with convergence between genders. |
| Macaulay, 2003 | LFS and NESP, 1996-2001 | Small declines in those in employment for more than one year. |
| Fitzner, 2006 | NESP, 1995-2005 | Number in employment for more than one year falls a little in the late 1990s but then stabilises. |
| Auer and Cazes, 2000 | LFS 1992-9 | "There has been little change for men and a lengthening of women's tenure." |
| Cazes and Tonin, 2010 | LFS 1999-2006 | Figures confirm picture from earlier research of tenure stability during the 1990s, though younger workers may spend a prolonged period outside stable employment. |
| Doogan, 2001 | LFS 1992-9 | A "significant and widespread increase in long-term employment". |

Macaulay's analysis of LFS data is not markedly different from the other studies considered here. There seems to have been some fall in tenure over the period, although this may be due to the cyclical effect noted above. Macaulay looks in more detail at the extent to which people have been in the same job for a year or more. The LFS data and NESPD data both show modest falls in this figure, in the case of the LFS from about 90 percent to about 87 percent from 1996 to 2001. NESPD data shows a similar decline, from 82 percent to 79 percent for men and from just below 80 percent to 75 percent for women. The discrepancies probably reflect the fact that the LFS only picks up changes of employer (Macaulay, 2003, p.543). This suggests that roughly 8 percent of men and 10-12 percent of women moved jobs within their firm across the period covered. Again, the overall changes to tenure seem small and to be expected at this point (an upswing) in the economic cycle. As Macaulay points out, tenure tends to level out around 1998-9, during which there was a modest slowdown in growth.

Regarding personal characteristics, age and family circumstances are again seen to be key factors. Young people are generally less likely to be found in the same job as a year earlier (though, as Macaulay notes, for 16-17 year olds, where we see the sharpest fall, issues such as the prevalence of holiday jobs are relevant). Those who are married or cohabiting, whether male or female, are 5 or 6 percent more likely to be in the same job. Those with children are slightly more likely to be in the same job (Macaulay, 2003, pp.544-545). As the age of children increases, so does the likelihood of their parents remaining in the same job as a year ago. However, this is quite possibly a result of parents with older children being themselves older and therefore more likely to be in long-term jobs. One interesting result is that Macaulay, in contrast with earlier studies, finds that educational qualifications increase tenure, rather than making workers more mobile, except for workers with no qualifications whatsoever who are the least mobile group (Macaulay, 2003, p.546).

Considering full and part-time work, the effect on tenure is far more pronounced for men than for women. For men, according to the data from the NESPD, there is a gap of about 20 percent between full-time and part-time male workers who had been in their job for a year or more, and the divergence grew from 1998 to 2001. For women, the gap is closer to 3 or 4 percent. Given that some part-time workers will lie below the tax threshold, and not be picked up in the figures, we have to treat these results with caution (Macaulay, 2003, p.547). However, the apparent stability of part-time work for women is noteworthy and will be considered in more detail in chapter 7.

Grant Fitzner's (2006) research on behalf of the Department of Trade and Industry looks at trends from the mid-1990s to the mid-2000s, again using the NESPD. As in Macaulay's work, he finds that the proportion of employees in the same job as 12 months previously fell during the late 1990s, but stabilised between 1998 and either 2001 or 2002

(depending on the category because Fitzner looks at public, private and non-profit jobs separately); it then rises to a new peak in 2004 (Fitzner, 2006, p.18). He also notes that involuntary separations fell fairly steadily from 1995 to 2005 as a proportion of separations and that redundancy rates were low and falling, if less steadily, across the period.

A paper by Nickell and others (2002) differs from those already considered in that it focuses purely on job terminations, rather than tenure, and only among men. The authors concentrate on entry into unemployment. The proportion of male employees reported as entering unemployment *voluntarily* does not exhibit a strong secular trend through the 1980s and 1990s, although a glance at their chart shows the expected countercyclical pattern. The probability of entering unemployment (whether voluntarily or involuntarily) in a given month for male employees was by 1997 lower than it was in the late 1960s but again shows little secular trend since 1967. The authors do note a tendency for the overall unemployment rate to grow between the late 1960s and the early 1980s. This implies longer periods of unemployment in later years, suggesting that, even if the chances of unemployment have not grown, the consequences have. However, this tendency ends in the mid-1980s. A regression analysis of the data reveals:

There has been no systematic increase, on average, in the chance of becoming unemployed. The only significant overall change is that during the recession of the early 1990s, the probability of unemployment entry rose to a significantly higher level than its maximum during the previous two recessions (Nickell et al, 2002, p.11).

Sandrine Cazes is another author who paints a picture of relative job stability. Here two comparative studies are considered, conducted with a gap of ten years between them (Auer and Cazes, 2000; Cazes and Tonin, 2010). The earlier of these considers the European Union, US and Japan. While the ranking of tenure between countries changes only a little, there are large discrepancies between average tenures in different countries, far greater than the changes over time in a particular country during, say, the 1990s. This suggests “that labour market institutions and labour market behaviour are major explanatory factors” (Auer and Cazes, 2000, pp.381-382, 405).

As for the figures, Auer and Cazes use a slightly different method of calculation to other authors, and arrive at different results for the UK, based on the same LFS data as Gregg and Wadsworth. Gregg and Wadsworth, for instance, exclude workers who could not, due to their age, have been in employment for more than ten years from the population out of which they calculate the proportion with elapsed tenure of ten years or more. By not excluding these workers, Auer and Cazes generate a much lower figure for this category (compare Gregg and Wadsworth, 2002, p.116, table 1, with Auer and Cazes, 2000, p.382,

table 2). Auer and Cazes also calculate mean rather than median tenure. Combining the results from both Cazes's papers shows a remarkable stability in this figure for the UK (see table 3.3).

Table 3.3: Mean elapsed job tenure, UK

| | 199 2 | 199 5 | 199 8 | 199 9 | 200 0 | 200 1 | 200 4 | 200 5 | 200 6 |
|--------------------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Mean tenure (years) | 8.1 | 8.2 | 8.2 | 8.2 | 8.2 | 8.1 | 8.2 | 8.2 | 8.3 |

(Compiled from data in Auer and Cazes, 2000; Cazes and Tonin, 2010)

Surveying the whole range of countries they conclude:

There has been little change for men and a lengthening of women's tenure, resulting in general stability or a slight increase of average tenure in all the countries under review but one: Ireland, where even overall tenure has declined significantly (Auer and Cazes, 2000, pp.385-386).

Ten years later, Cazes and Tonin add that "the figures for 1999-2006 seem to confirm previous findings for the period 1992-99" (Cazes and Tonin, 2010, p.265). This reinforces the view of Burgess and Rees. However, like Gregg and Wadsworth, the Cazes papers do envisage a pool or particularly young workers who are, at least for a time, trapped in insecure jobs. Most will eventually join the "stable segment" of the labour market, but their time on the outside "may be prolonged" (Auer and Cazes, 2000, p.389). Cazes and Tonin also decompose the changes in tenure into those produced by an aging population and those caused by other factors. They find that while there is a 0.08 years increase in average tenure in the UK from 1999-2006, we would expect a 0.19 years increase due to changes to the age distribution of the population. Other factors must have caused a 0.11 year reduction over this seven year period. However, and in contrast to other studies, they also show that elapsed tenure increased for the very youngest group of workers that they consider, 15-24 year olds, from 1.9 to 2.0 years over the same period (Cazes and Tonin, 2010, pp.266, 268).

An even stronger assertion of job stability has been offered by Kevin Doogan both for the UK (Doogan, 2001) and more broadly across the advanced economies (Doogan, 2005, 2009, 2015). He writes of the 1990s in the UK, "Contrary to the anticipated decline in long-term employment...there has been a significant and widespread increase in long-term employment during this period" (Doogan, 2001, p.422).

Doogan focuses in his 2001 paper on a specific period, 1992-9, and uses comparisons between the two endpoints, using LFS data obtained via the Eurostat database. These end points are not at the same point in the respective economic cycles. 1992 comes after the UK enters a recession characterised by high rate of entry into unemployment, whereas 1999 is during a period of growth. However, as Doogan points out, it is all the more extraordinary if there has been an increase in long-term work given that this was a period of expansion of both the economy and the workforce, which would typically be associated with shortening tenure. He also considers what he calls “long-term employment”, employment with an elapsed tenure of ten years or more, which is “arguably less susceptible to sudden shifts in the size of the workforce” (Doogan, 2001, p.423). Overall, during the period considered, long-term employment grew from 28.6 percent to 33.0 percent of the workforce. This expansion took place not just among women (21.2 to 28.5 percent) but also, if less dramatically, among men (34.6 to 36.7 percent). It grew also, in almost every sector of the economy, including both growing and declining industries, challenging the notion of a new economic paradigm characterised by precarious jobs.

Doogan also questions the notion that there is an automatic link between part-time work and precarity. Large numbers of younger workers, particularly students, work part time. However, focusing only on those aged 30 years or more, the proportion of part-time workers in long-term employment has increased from 24.0 to 30.2 percent. This marks some convergence with the workforce as a whole, where long-term employment for those aged 30 or over rose less rapidly, from 39.7 to 42.6 percent (Doogan, 2001, pp.429, 431). More recent work shows evidence of convergence of tenure between part-time and full-time work across the European Union generally (Doogan, 2015, p.47).

One other paper on job tenure (Booth et al, 1999) is noteworthy because, unlike the other research considered here, it attempts the difficult task of looking at trends from 1915-90 (though the overwhelming bulk of the data is from the post-war period). The authors use the British Household Panel Survey, from 1993, in which people look back over their employment history. This covers 5,500 households and roughly 10,000 individuals randomly selected from Britain.

There are obvious problems with this approach—notably recall bias, particular among participants looking back over almost seven decades to remember short spells of employment, but also selection bias (Booth et al, 1999, p.67). The authors found that the “length of job of an average worker (or the mean duration calculated over individuals in employment) is 15.6 years for men and 14.7 years for women”. This can be compared to the figures for completed tenure in Burgess and Rees—“approximately 20 years for men and nearly 14 years for women” (Booth et al, 1999, p.47). The authors did also note a decline in average tenure for cohorts entering the labour market later in time but that the patterns for men and women tends to converge over time.

3.5 “Non-standard” employment

The second area of enquiry identified above is the de-standardisation of employment. Here the literature is vast and only a selection of the writing, specifically that focusing on the UK with some empirical component, will be considered. In this context it is necessary to consider what constitutes “standard” employment, the various forms of de-standardisation and the evidence of their prevalence in the UK. A table giving an overall summary of trends is presented in section 3.6.

3.5.1 *Part-time work*

The UK has exhibited high levels of part-time working for a developed economy since the 1970s. This was not true in the immediate post-war years; part-time employment was just 4 percent of total employment in 1951 (Gallie, 1988, p.15). By 1995 the figure, defined as those working 30 hours a week or less, had surpassed 25 percent of employees, and remained in the range 24.9-26.1 percent from then until 2009. In the wake of the 2008-9 recession, the proportion of those working part-time peaked at just over 27 percent in summer 2010 before declining, dropping below 26 percent in 2017 (data from ONS table EMP01, seasonally adjusted). Part-time work is widely used across the economy. In 2011, 79 percent of workplaces with over five employees were found to have some part-time employees (Wanrooy et al, 2013b, p.30).

Part-time work is strongly associated with gender, being concentrated among women workers, and this connection also grew through the 1990s (Millward et al, 2000, pp.44-46). The steady post-war growth in female employment is, in fact, one of the most important shifts in the overall structure of employment in Britain, rising from about three in ten employees in 1954 to four in ten by 1986 to about half of employees today (Gallie, 1988, p.15; Swaffield, 2011, p.174). The expansion of women’s employment between the 1950s “has been virtually entirely an expansion of part-time work” (Gallie et al, 1998, p.11). Indeed, the growth of part-time work can be seen as the consequence of continued inegalitarianism in gender relations coexisting with the greater integration of women into the labour force. While women often “choose” part-time work, this is, for many, a “choice” imposed on them by virtue of the fact that they are expected to play a disproportionate role in the maintenance of the household and, in particular, raising children. Part-time work remains strongly associated with childrearing:

While British fathers are more likely to work than men without children, the opposite is true for women... The employment rate of fathers is typically not sensitive to the age or number of children, but

that of mothers is highly sensitive to both: 65 percent youngest child aged 1-3, 74 percent 4-10, 80 percent 11-18... When mothers, especially those with young children, work, it is usually part-time (Connolly et al, 2016, p.841).

The persistence of sexist attitudes is reflected in the British Social Attitudes survey of 2012. Some 33 percent of people surveyed believed that, if there was a child under school age present, the woman should stay at home, and an even greater 43 percent believed that she should work part-time, with just 5 percent saying she should work full time (Scott and Clery, 2013). However, there has been a gradual move towards families with children in which both parents work full-time, which by 2013 was about as common as the previously more prevalent “1.5 earners” models in which the woman would work part time (Connolly et al, 2016). This has taken place despite the limited provision of childcare in the UK, compared with countries such as France and Denmark, which inhibits women with children returning to full-time work (Gash, 2008).

However, even if the prevalence of part-time work among women is a reflection of the wider oppression faced by women, this does not necessarily mean that part-time work can be regarded as “non-standard” (which, anyway, would be a strange designation for a role occupied by a quarter of the workforce). It is also questionable whether part-time work can be automatically associated with precarity (Gumbrell-McCormick, 2011; Kalleberg, 2014, p.2). There is nothing inherently contingent about working fewer hours in a given week, and in this sense part-time work is quite different from temporary work. In a formal sense, legislation has protected part-time employees since the 2000 Part-time Workers (Prevention of Less Favourable Treatment) Regulations, although as Bell (2011) points out, there are flaws in this legislation from the worker’s perspective, making it hard to enforce in practice. The part-time worker would have to locate a full-time equivalent to act as the “comparator”, demonstrate that the less favourable treatment was because they were part-time and show that the treatment was not “justified on objective grounds”. According to Bell, there is not much sign that the regulations have either altered the degree of part-time work used by employers in the UK or significantly altered the character of part-time employment.

According to the 1992 Employment in Britain Survey, “there was no evidence that part-timers were more likely than full-timers to feel that their jobs were in practice insecure”; in addition, women part-time workers were no more likely to move into unemployment than full-timers (Gallie et al, 1998, pp.170, 171). Felstead and Gallie’s (2004) analysis of the 2001 British Skills Survey also shows that perceptions of insecurity among part-time workers in Britain do not differ from those of full-time workers. Subsequent analysis of the Skills and Employment Survey 12 years later again showed that there was no

significant difference between part-time and full-time employees when it came to anxiety about losing the job or about loss of status in the job (Gallie et al, 2017).

The recession of 2008-9 and the period of austerity that followed did have a disproportionate effect on women in employment generally. A detailed study of the period from December 2007 to June 2011 by Jill Rubery and Anthony Rafferty (2013) shows that the impact varied considerably between sectors. Although overall the share of women in employment increased slightly from 46.5 percent to 46.6 percent, if the 2007 gender share in all sectors had been maintained, the overall share of women ought to have increased by 0.8 percent. Some of the biggest gendered effects were in finance and insurance, where women accounted for an astonishing 92 percent of job losses, and in wholesale, retail and restaurants, where women accounted for 58.8 percent of job losses despite making up only 49.6 percent of the sector in 2007 (Rubery and Rafferty, 2013, pp.419-420). Initially, women's employment in the public sector appears to have been more resilient, with an increase in the female share of employment, but Rubery and Rafferty (2013, p.421) expected this protective effect to decline with the increasing impact of austerity on the public sector (see section 7.4 below). Nonetheless, the disproportionate impact of the recession on women does not appear to have been primarily driven by part-time working. Indeed, Rubery and Rafferty (2013, p.427) find evidence for an expansion of relatively high quality, well-paid part-time roles up to 2011—a continuation of trends seen prior to the recession (Gallie and Zhou, 2011).

One change noted by Cam (2012) is the recent increase in *involuntary* part-time working, from about 10 percent at the turn of the century to 16 percent in 2010. Although involuntary part-time working is a slippery concept, as choices are often constrained by factors such as access to affordable childcare rather than genuine preference (Gash, 2008), the growth is noteworthy. Much of the recent rise in involuntary part-time work is among male workers and appears to be a consequence of the recent recession. It is focused on low paid, non-unionised workplaces in the private sector (Cam, 2012; Rubery and Rafferty, 2013). This reflects a fall in hours worked in these areas of employment and similar or larger rises in part-time employment took place in the previous two recessions (Gregg and Wadsworth, 2011, p.14). It would be rash, therefore, to assume that the recent rise will be sustained based on data from the years following the 2008-9 recession when it may simply be a cyclical phenomenon. Indeed, after peaking at 18.5 percent in spring 2013, by 2017 the proportion of part-time employees who were in part-time work involuntarily had fallen back to about 12.5 percent (data from ONS table EMP01, seasonally adjusted).

Overall it seems sensible to treat part-time work as a specific category of standard employment until it is proven to be otherwise. In that spirit, it will be examined primarily in chapter 7, dealing with employment tenure, rather than in chapter 6, dealing with

non-standard employment, in order to determine if part-time work, in particular among women, is genuinely more contingent.

3.5.2 Temporary work

The temporary worker can be defined as “an individual who earns monetary reward from work that is established by the employer or contract to last for a limited period” (Biggs, Burchell and Millmore, 2006). The use of such contracts can reflect a desire to achieve numerical flexibility in the workforce, catering for market fluctuations in demand without the costs associated with permanent staff; to cover short-term vacancies, for instance for maternity leave; or to reduce costs of hiring or managing workers. The latter is particularly the case when employment agencies are used (see section 3.5.3). In the UK, reducing wages and non-wage costs have not been widely cited as a motivation for employing temporary workers and there is some evidence that temporary workers may be more expensive, at least in terms of marginal costs (Biggs, Burchell and Millmore, 2006). In some cases, temporary work can also be used to screen potential permanent employees (Forde, 2001).

There has been no systematic rise in temporary work in the neoliberal period in the UK. One study of the LFS data for the period up to 2009 found:

[T]here is very little evidence that the share of temporary jobs has changed much over the past 25 years. Around 5 percent of those in employment are in temporary work. There may be a cyclical element to some of the (small) changes observed over time. The share of temporary jobs appears to rise at the onset of any recovery in the labour market and fall at the end of the recovery and onset of recession. This suggests that firms may offer more temporary jobs when the prospect of sustained recovery is still uncertain and then take on more permanent workers thereafter (Gregg et al, 2011, p.103).

There has been no significant change since, with the figure staying in the 5.9-6.5 percent range from 2010. Of these, as Fevre (2007) points out, almost 30 percent in the September 2006 data “said they did not actually want a permanent job”. This figure fell in the wake of the 2008-9 recession, dropping to 20 percent in autumn 2012, but rose again to over 25 percent by the end of 2016 (data from ONS table EMP01, seasonally adjusted).

The relatively limited use of temporary contracts may reflect the lack of regulation in the labour market, reflecting the ease with which UK firms can “hire and fire the members of their core workforce with ‘permanent’ contracts of employment” (Hudson, 2002, p.41). For instance, the two-year qualifying period for protection from unfair dismissal, which stood for much of the neoliberal period (though from 1979 to 1985 and again from 1999

to 2012 it was one year), “may have served as a functional equivalent to temporary contracts” (Gebel, 2010, p.645).

There has been debate about the extent to which temporary contracts serve a bridge to permanent employment. Booth, Francesconi and Frank (2002, p.202) show, based on British Household Panel Survey data, that the “median duration of fixed-term contracts before exit into permanent jobs is about 3 years for men and 3½ years for women” and “regardless of the type of temporary employment and gender, about 70 percent of workers gaining permanency continue working for the same employer”, which supports the notion of temporary work as a “stepping stone to permanent work”, at least in some cases. Similarly, Gebel (2010) shows that while a substantial minority of one in five new entrants into employment begin on temporary contracts, after a year these entrants have only a 22 percent lower chance of being on a permanent contract than those who started out in permanent employment. After five years the probability is only 6 percent lower.

Legislation securing similar rights for temporary workers to those of permanent workers, notably the Fixed-term Employees (Prevention of Less Favourable Treatment) Regulations in 2002, may have had an impact in limiting the rise of temporary employment. According to a survey of employers conducted by Biggs, Burchell and Millmore (2006), “[I]t was evident that employers were very aware of future legislation,” though the authors do not rule out other economic reasons for the modest decline in temporary employment from the late 1990s onwards.

3.5.3 Agency work

One specific form of temporary employment that requires careful consideration is agency work, in which workers are hired by an agency to work at a third-party employer. The presence of an additional party mediating between the place of work and the worker makes this arrangement qualitatively distinct from the other major forms of temporary work: fixed-term work, casual work and seasonal work (Biggs, Burchell and Millmore, 2006).

The use of agency workers did increase in the early neoliberal period in the UK, rising from 50,000 in 1984 to 250,000 in 1999 according to LFS data (Forde, 2001). However, subsequent research using this data showed a modest decline in the use of agency workers from 1998 to 2000, after which the figure stabilised at about 1.25 percent of all workers (Biggs, Burchell and Millmore, 2006; Forde and Slater, 2014). It appears to have risen a little in the period since the 2008-9 recession, slightly surpassing the figure seen in the late 1990s (Judge and Tomlinson, 2016).

The figures reported in the LFS have been challenged as an underestimate of the extent of agency work, a fact ignored in most of the academic literature. According to a review of evidence by the Department for Business Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (BERR, 2008), the limitations of the LFS include the problem that individuals may not identify themselves as agency workers and that many assignments are brief, “just 15 minutes in some cases”, and may be second or third jobs for those surveyed. BERR’s own analysis suggests that for just over half of agency workers who knew how long they had been on their current assignment, the duration of employment was less than three months. In addition, it seems unlikely that the recruitment industry would employ a reported staff of “between 200,000 and 225,000 individuals” to support an agency workforce of just 250,000 people (although agencies do more than simply supply temporary workers). Table 3.4 shows the different estimates for the extent of agency work.

Table 3.4: Estimates for agency work in the UK

| | Survey of Recruitment Agencies (SOR) | | Recruitment and Employment Confederation (REC) Census | | Labour Force Survey (Q4 data) | |
|----------------------------------|---|-----------|--|-----------|--|---------|
| Year | 1999 | 2007 | 1997 | 2006 | 1998 | 2007 |
| Number | 550,000 | 1,523,000 | 879,000 | 1,080,000 | 259,000 | 264,000 |
| % of labour force | 2.0% | 5.2% | 3.3% | 3.7% | 1.0% | 0.9% |

(Source: BERR, 2008)

There is some basis for scepticism about the large leap in agency employment measured by the SOR. The two surveys, in 1999 and 2007, were performed by different companies on behalf of BERR (and its predecessor, the Department for Trade and Industry), covering a different scope—Great Britain in 1999 and the UK in 2007. No response rate is given for 1999 (in 2007 it was 48 percent). The REC census was also conducted by different companies in the two different years, and the response rate for the 1997 survey is given as 7-8 percent, compared with 42 percent in 2006 (BERR, 2008, annex A). For these reasons, while the absolute figure given by the LFS is almost certainly an underestimate, with the true figure often described as being in the 1-1.5 million range, the trends reported by other surveys are not a reliable guide to the *growth* of agency work.

The disparity between reported figures also calls into question the true extent of temporary work in general. According to BERR (2008, annex B):

The wording of the LFS questions may also result in misclassifications. Respondents are not asked if they are employed by an agency. They are simply asked to describe their temporary status, and given five choices: fixed contract, seasonal, casual, agency workers and other. A large number of agency workers may self-categorise themselves as other types of temporary worker.

This suggests misallocation between categories of temporary employment. However, the total number of temporary workers in all categories recorded by the LFS in the fourth quarter of 2007 was 1,495,000: *lower* than the highest estimate for agency workers. One possibility is that large numbers of workers who have a permanent contract also have a second job as an agency worker. A second possibility was revealed by a study by the Resolution Foundation (Judge and Tomlinson, 2016), showing that large number of workers describe themselves as *both* permanent and agency workers, a group only picked up in the LFS after a new question was introduced in 2011. By 2016, this group amounted to 440,000 people, outnumbering those who describe themselves as *temporary* agency workers. Together with a smaller number of those classified as self-employed and those who do agency work in their second job, the Resolution Foundation investigation of the LFS data suggested a total of 865,000 agency workers in the UK by 2016—3 percent of the labour force. Of the “permanent” agency workers, over half had been in their current employment for two years or more and almost a quarter for over five years. Unfortunately, it is not possible to compare this figure for agency work to those prior to 2011. Judge and Tomlinson (2016) instead extrapolate the data back to 2001 by assuming a constant “temporary to permanent agency worker ratio”. This suggests a fairly stable level of agency work from 2001 until 2010, with a subsequent rise up to 2016.

One factor limiting the rise in agency work may be the introduction of legislation affording greater rights to agency workers, notably the European Union’s Agency Workers Regulations, which came into effect in the UK from October 2011 but which had been drafted as early as 2002 (Biggs, Burchell and Millmore, 2006; Forde and Slater, 2014; Forde and Slater, 2016). Prior to these regulations, agency work had been, relative to other forms of temporary work, weakly regulated in the UK. The new regulations entitle agency workers to equal treatment to that of permanent employees, as regards basic work and employment conditions, after 12 weeks in their job—although there are a range of contractual arrangements that are not within the scope of the new regulations (Forde and Slater, 2014). An additional clause in the legislation, known as the Swedish Derogation, “allows agencies to offer workers a ‘pay between assignments’ contract which should guarantee a permanent income stream. In exchange, the agency worker forgoes their right to equal pay” (Judge and Tomlinson, 2016, p.14). It is possible that some of those who receive “pay between assignments” are among those who regard themselves as both permanent employees and agency workers.

The motivations for using agency staff are similar to those for the use of temporary workers more generally. According to data from the 2004 Workplace Employment Relations Survey, the overwhelming motivations were to match staff to peak demand (a factor for 41 percent of managers where professionals/managers were hired, 35 percent elsewhere) and to cover staff absences (58 percent and 53 percent respectively). A smaller number of managers reported that they used agencies because they struggled to fill vacancies (22 percent and 24 percent). Where professionals or managers were hired through agencies, 21 percent of managers reported that it was to obtain specialist skills (Heywood et al, 2011). This is revealing because it suggests that the motivation was not generally to replace permanent with temporary employees. Again, as with temporary employment more generally, few managers reported being motivated by cost savings, and indeed there may not be any from employing agency workers given the fees incurred (Heywood et al, 2011).

3.5.4 Zero-hours contracts

Recent years have seen zero-hours contracts (ZHCs), in which no hours of work are guaranteed, come to prominence in discussions of precarious employment in the UK. However, they are not a new phenomenon: “Litigation arising from the use of zero-hours contracts...can be traced back nearly 40 years. In *Mailway [(Southern) Ltd v Willsher 1978]*, for example, the claimant postal packer ‘could and would only attend work in accordance with the need expressed by the employers’” (Adams, et al, 2015, p.6). The term *zero-hours contract* was in use as early as 1986 (Dickens, 1988). More generally, as Adams and others (2015) point out, there is neither a single clear legal definition nor a unitary practical one that can fully encompass the range of employment situations in which contracts do not offer a set number of hours. Indeed, there is discussion about whether those on ZHCs are straightforwardly in an employment relationship, with one interpretation being that they are employees while engaged in work but become “workers without an employment relationship who are dependent and self-employed” once their shift ends (Mandl et al, 2015, p.59).

Despite their long-standing use, the academic literature on ZHCs in the UK is limited, and much of what is known comes from reports from the Office for National Statistics (ONS). As well as defining ZHCs, determining the scale of their use is also difficult. For instance, the LFS simply asks those (and only those) in employment and who report that their main employment includes some form of flexibility whether they are on a zero-hours contract, offering clarification only if a definition is sought by the interviewee. This is problematic because the figures will then reflect both the awareness on the part of the interviewee of their contract type (it is possible to be on a ZHC without realising it) and their awareness

of the term ZHC, which has risen sharply since 2013 when the issue became a topic of widespread discussion in the media. There is an additional problem in measuring the increase in the use of ZHCs, because, until October 2013, a “check” was incorrectly included in the questionnaire for the LFS, preventing interviewees from saying that they were both on a ZHC and a shift worker leading to a “sizeable” discontinuity in the data (Chandler, 2014).

According to the ONS (2016), the October-December 2015 LFS found 801,000 people with ZHCs in their main employment, or 2.5 percent of employees. This is a rise from 697,000 (2.3 percent) a year earlier, though “it is not possible to say how much of this increase is due to greater recognition of the term ‘zero-hours contracts’ rather than additional contracts”. However, “over half of the increase” was among those who had been with their current employer more than a year, suggesting that unless they had been moved onto a ZHC by their employer in the intervening year, the rise reflected greater awareness. The ONS also performed a survey of 5,000 businesses in November 2015. This business survey indicated there were 1.7 million contracts (about 6 percent of the total) offering no guaranteed hours that saw work carried out in the fortnight beginning 9 November 2015. This represents a decrease from a previous survey in May 2015, which estimated 2.1 million ZHCs. However, the estimates have a 95 percent confidence interval of $\pm 425,000$, suggesting a true figure in the range 1.3-2.2 million for November 2015. The figure for the number of contracts would be expected to exceed the figures reported in the LFS, and not simply due to underreporting in the latter. In addition, the LFS focuses on the main employment of the interviewee, not any second job they might have with a ZHC. Indeed, it is possible for a single employee to have multiple ZHCs.

The ONS (2016) offers some further insights into the nature of ZHC workers. Over 40 percent of businesses with at least 250 employees make some use of ZHCs, compared with just 10 percent of businesses with fewer than ten. Both ONS surveys show that they are particularly highly concentrated in “Accommodation and Food Services”, where roughly a quarter of businesses use them. The LFS also shows a high concentration (over 20 percent) of employees on ZHCs in “Health and Social Work”. They are also concentrated among younger employees: 38 percent of those with ZHCs are aged 16-24, despite this group making up only 12 percent of total employment. This partly reflects the high number of full-time students on ZHCs: 23 percent of all those on ZHCs, despite students making up only 3 percent of total employment.

ZHCs are potentially a source of precarity as it has been defined here. They allow the employer enormous flexibility in determining the hours worked—or indeed if any are worked at all. While it is also generally understood that the worker is not obliged to accept any work offered while on a ZHC, whether this is really the case will depend on the balance of power between the employer and employee. One survey of businesses

suggested that “a fifth of employers (21 percent) say that contracts give workers the right to turn work down when, in practice, they are always or sometimes expected to accept all work offered. A further 14 percent say their zero-hour contracts do not allow employees to turn work down” (CIPD, 2015).

Until May 2015 ZHCs could contain “exclusivity clauses”, prohibiting the employees from finding work elsewhere, though these have now been made unenforceable. Further changes strengthened these regulations in January 2016, after which dismissing a ZHC worker because they took work with another employer became automatic grounds for unfair dismissal and any detriment suffered by a ZHC worker for breaching an exclusivity clause became unlawful. However, as with many such regulations, these changes assume that the worker will both understand their rights and be able to access an employment tribunal to enforce them. According to a Resolution Foundation report by Pennycook, Cory and Alakeson (2013, p.13):

[T]he fact that many zero-hours contracts are drafted in such a way as to avoid conferring the formal employment status of “employee” suggests that some employers use zero-hours contracts to avoid obligations such as maternity and paternity leave, the right to request flexible working and potential redundancy costs (although it should be noted that we found evidence of some employers abusing the flexible nature of zero-hours contracts in order to reduce staff to small or zero-working hours and thereby circumvent the issue of redundancy altogether).

These authors offer two reasons for the growth in ZHCs, assuming, given the enormous uncertainties in the figures, one has in fact taken place. The first is the conditions of recession and weak recovery in the UK, leading to private employers being cautious about taking on staff. They add a second reason: “According to a number of employers and employer representatives we spoke to, the 2010 Agency Workers Regulations (SI 2010/93) which implemented the 2008 European Union Temporary and Agency Worker Directive (2008/104/EC) may also have contributed to the growth” (Pennycook et al, 2013, p.15). In other words, the rights to equal pay and conditions accorded to agency workers may have led some employers to turn to ZHCs instead. Another survey (CIPD, 2015) suggests that avoiding agency fees motivated 14 percent of employers to use ZHCs. However, while employers may wish to avoid extra fees associated with agency workers, as with the forms of temporary work considered above, reducing costs of employment per se is not the major consideration for employers using ZHCs. According to a survey by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, only 21 percent of respondents give this as their motivation, whereas “managing fluctuations in demand” motivated 67 percent; providing flexibility for the individuals, 51 percent; and providing cover for absences, 48 percent (CIPD, 2015).

3.5.5 Self-employment and the "gig economy"

Self-employment, and particularly novel forms of employment relationship in which workers are nominally self-employed, have attracted great attention in recent years. This reflects the growth in self-employment since the 2008-9 recession, which accounted for the bulk of the rise in employment during the recovery, reaching a new high of 15 percent of the labour force. This is a continuation of a longer-term increase, which saw self-employment rise steadily from 2001 when it stood at about 12 percent of the total labour force (Wales and Amankwah, 2016).

The rise in self-employment over the past decade and a half follows an even more dramatic one in the period from 1979 to 1991, when it increased from just below 8 percent to around 13 percent of the labour force, after which time it stabilised and then fell somewhat, before resuming its upward trajectory in 2001. A certain amount of caution is required interpreting the figures and trends, as much of the late 1990s fall came as a result of a reclassification of some construction workers, who make up about a fifth of the self-employed, as employees on the initiative of the Inland Revenue (Weir, 2003). Exactly who is classified as self-employed is largely a legal question or, in the LFS, a matter of the subjective view of the person being interviewed.

The literature indicates that the 1980s rise in self-employment was due to a combination of favourable policies under Thatcher's governments and associated developments in the housing market. Cowling and Mitchell (1997) argue one factor driving rising self-employment was the Loan Guarantee Scheme, introduced in 1981, in which the government acted as guarantor for 70-80 percent of loans up to £100,000. Subsequently, in 1983 the government introduced the Enterprise Allowance Scheme, which paid a small income to participants during their first year of self-employment. However, a more important explanatory factor was the buoyant housing market, which allowed individuals to use the equity in their home to start their own business. The biggest factor in determining the long-run level of self-employment was the "income differential" between employed and self-employed workers. The overall "stock" of unemployed people is not thought to be significant, but the balance between short and long-term unemployed is important: "As the ratio of short-term to long-term unemployment falls, a pool of structurally unemployed workers is created...they are marginalised to such a degree that self-employment becomes a last resort option" (Cowling and Mitchell, 1997, p.437). The rise in self-employment may then also reflect structural changes to the economy in this period, in which manufacturing industry was in sharp decline helping to generate this pool of longer-term unemployed.

According to Meager, Court and Moralee (1994, p.3) the result of these trends and policies was a self-employed labour force that was extremely diverse, with the self-employed “over-represented in both the richest and poorest 10 percent of earners”. They found that the low income self-employed were often in occupations such as cleaning, hairdressing, agricultural work or the clothing industry—and disproportionately were women, who by this time made up about a quarter of the self-employed. The high income self-employed tended to be in “banking, finance and business services, as well as construction” (Meager et al, 1994, p.3). Self-employment increased threefold the likelihood of someone falling into the lowest 10 percent by income, implying that the existence of a pool of poorer self-employed people stretches back to this period. Indeed the growth of self-employment in the 1980s seems to coincide with a significant decline and stabilisation at low levels of the ratio of earnings of self-employed to employed workers (Robson, 1997).

During the post-2001 increase in self-employment, the absolute growth in part-time and full-time self-employment was approximately equal. However, because part-time self-employment has historically been the exception this represents an 88 percent growth in part-time self-employment and a 25 percent growth in full-time self-employment.

Recent research by the Office for National Statistics (Wales and Amankwah, 2016) has considered the reasons for the growth of, and the growing part-time share in, self-employment. Increases in self-employment are often attributed to an aging population, as older people are more likely to be self-employed. This accounts for around one quarter of the rise of self-employment since 2001. A further third can be accounted for by an increasing participation rate in the workforce generally. This leaves a residual of about 40 percent still to be explained, which Wales and Amankwah (2016) refer to as a “change in self-employment propensity”. They add: “This change in self-employment propensity also appears to have been affected by a combination of stronger if volatile in-flows, and stable or weakening out-flows from self-employment.” There has been growth of self-employment in all age groups—but a particularly noticeable surge among the over-70s, and part-time self-employment is increasingly focused on older workers.

Regarding the striking rise in part-time self-employment, in 2001 a large share of this group was composed of younger and mid-aged women, along with older men. By 2015 adding to these categories were large numbers of older women. This suggests part-time self-employment is driven both by women with families seeking flexible forms of employment and by older people, now including women, delaying retirement. The possibility of combining self-employment with childcare is reinforced by a study by La Valle and Bell (2003), which found that 44 percent of self-employed mothers without employees only worked from home, compared with just 10 percent of self-employed fathers without employees. Self-employed women use less childcare and are more likely to have prime responsibility for childcare than employed women. Some 55 percent of those

who were self-employed without employees cited childcare reasons as their reason for being self-employed.

Occupationally, “[p]art-time self-employed workers have also become more concentrated in the education and finance and business services industries over the last 15 years, shifting away from health and social work and wholesale and retail trade” (Wales and Amankwah, 2016). There have been similar shifts among full-time self-employed workers.

Wales and Amankwah (2016) also show that an overwhelmingly majority of those in part-time self-employment do not want to work full-time. Furthermore, only a small minority of the part-time self-employed report “negative” reasons (such as redundancy or being unable to find employment) as the reason why they are self-employed. The only group where there is strong dissatisfaction is among younger men, but these are a relatively small component of the part-time self-employed. The same is true of those in full-time self-employment. At this aggregate level, there is little evidence of a surge in precarity among the self-employed.

The association of self-employment with a “peripheral” workforce denied the advantages of permanent employment is long-standing, going back to the 1980s surge. However, as Nisbet (1997) points out it has also long been recognised that some workers prefer to be self-employed and enjoy a number of advantages, ranging from the ability to earn more (perhaps through longer hours) to the absence of direct supervision of the labour process, calling into question the “dualist” perspective. Nisbet’s interviews of those working in the construction sector—then, as now, the largest area of self-employment—found that “independence in the job”, “job satisfaction” and “opportunities for higher earnings” were the three most frequently cited reasons for preferring self-employment. Even among the relatively disadvantaged and low skilled “groundworkers”, 60 percent of those self-employed still preferred their status to that of direct employment. Surveying the same terrain, some years later, Behling and Harvey (2015, p.970), make a distinction between “genuine self-employment found in small entrepreneurial jobbing construction” and “bogus” or “false” self-employment which “has become a dominant feature of major UK construction sites”. While about one fifth of “professionals” in the industry are self-employed, the figure for manual workers or “operatives” is now just over half. False self-employment, as well as reducing tax liabilities, evades the responsibilities of employers, including that of permanence of employment, despite evincing many of the features of regular employment, such as “continuity of engagement with a single employer..., lack of control over working times, not supplying plant or materials, or obeying instructions in everyday routines” (Behling and Harvey, 2015, p.970).

A rather different workforce is examined by Cruz, Hardy and Sanders (2016) who consider false self-employment in the UK stripping industry. They found that although the dancers experienced high levels of managerial control, they nonetheless generally favoured their self-employed status, seeing it as affording greater “autonomy and flexibility”. This was the case even though management could limit the temporal flexibility of the dancers, for instance by summarily dismissing them, or penalising them in other ways, if they refused to work certain shifts; they also sometimes sought to prevent them working in alternative venues, another characteristic of false self-employment. In practice, the authors conclude that the attachment the women felt to the label of self-employment was “future-orientated” and reflected a desire for genuine self-employment without the restrictions imposed by the clubs in which they worked, rather than a desire for an employment contract. This group of workers could simultaneously be regarded as being in precarious employment *and* preferring self-employment, suggesting that preference does not automatically remove people from the objective situation of precarity.

However, the question remains as to how generalisable this situation is across the labour force as a whole. Here the discussions of self-employment merge into those surrounding what is becoming known as the “gig economy”, a concept that is only just starting to be explored in academia. Within popular discourse, the term has been used to refer to at least two somewhat different situations (OECD, 2016). First it describes the situation for freelance workers who obtain jobs from a range of different firms, often using an online platform such as Mechanical Turk (Amazon’s online marketplace for such jobs). A second usage refers to those occupying the porous boundary between (arguably “false”) self-employment and employee or worker states. Notable examples include those working for the Uber taxi firm, who Uber classify as self-employed drivers using the firm’s platform to obtain customers, or the cycle couriers of the food delivery firm Deliveroo. De Stefano (2016) refers to the two forms as “crowdwork” and “work-on-demand via app” respectively; elsewhere, crowdwork is referred to as “microwork”, “clickwork” or “microtasking” (Webster, 2016). Furthermore, as De Stefano (2016, pp.274-275) points out, even the two categories of gig economy work are themselves far from homogenous:

Crowdwork platforms, for instance, employ different methods for adjudicating tasks and for payment. Some of them may launch competitions with more persons working simultaneously on the same task and the client selecting and paying for only the best product. Some may operate on a first-come-first-served basis. In some cases, no relationship exists between the client and the worker: she executes the task and is paid by the platform, which then provides the result to the client. In other cases, the platform acts more as a facilitator of the relationship between clients and workers. Some platforms set minimum compensation for certain tasks whilst other let the

compensation be set by their requester. Moreover...the nature and the complexity of the tasks may vary significantly, also within the same platform.

Despite an enormous amount of attention in the press, the evidence of the emergence on a large scale of a gig economy is scarce (Brinkley, 2015). Brinkley cites research from PricewaterhouseCoopers suggesting that the gig economy will account for only about 1 percent of GDP in the UK from 2015-25. While De Stefano (2016) claims the figures are “non-negligible”, the data he cites, from Smith and Leberstein (2015), seems to consist of the total number of people who have used a range of platforms to find work. For instance, a figure of eight million is given for the workforce of the firm Crowdsource. This simply reflects the company’s own claims regarding its reach and cannot be taken as a workforce in the conventional sense.

One of the few independent attempts to measure the scale of involvement in the gig economy, defined in quite broad terms, was reported by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD, 2017). Their survey was carried out by YouGov using its pre-existing survey panel. It was based on a representative sample of 5,019 adults in the UK, aged 18 to 70, with fieldwork carried out via the Internet in December 2016 and followed up in early 2017 with phone interviews. The number of gig economy workers in the survey was boosted to allow more detailed analysis, although the authors do not explain how this was done. The CIPD define gig economy workers as those who “provide transport using their own car..., rent out their own vehicle..., deliver food or goods..., perform short-term jobs via online platforms that connect people looking for services..., [and those who are involved in] other work through an online platform” (CIPD, 2017, p.52). Even by these extremely broad criteria, only 4 percent of adults in the UK who are working could be said to be gig economy workers in some sense. However, the authors also report that 58 percent of gig economy workers are also permanent employees and that 20 percent are self-employed (presumably, although the report is not clear, primarily outside of the gig economy). This pushes the number of those working primarily in the gig economy below 1 percent, even by the CIPD’s definitions. If a new employment paradigm is emerging, there is little sign of it today.

The results of another recent survey by Huws, Spencer and Joyce (2016) are not yet published, but, according to an early working paper, their online survey was based on an existing IPSOS-Mori panel and consisted of 2,238 individuals aged 16-75. This found 5 percent of respondents did online, paid crowdwork at least weekly, 6 percent monthly in the UK. However, in the absence of controls for participation in online activity, these results must be treated with caution. Furthermore, 80 percent of those who participated weekly in crowdwork had other employment, suggesting, again, a figure of about 1 percent for the total participation in these forms of work as a primary source of income.

The range of different forms of work encompassed by terms such as “gig work” and “false” self-employment necessitate further empirical work to establish their scale and importance in the UK context and this will be one of the topics considered in chapter 6.

One other issue related to the purported rise of gig work is the notion that workers increasingly have to construct a “portfolio” of different jobs in order to get by. This view has been challenged recently by Corlett and Finch (2016) in a Resolution Foundation briefing note. Employees with second employee jobs make up just 1.9 percent of the labour force in the UK. Employees with a second self-employed job make up 1 percent, and those who regard themselves as self-employed in their main job with a second role (either self-employed or as employees) make up just 0.7 percent. Multiple job holding does not seem to be a major facet of working life in the UK (though this is clearly not the same as self-employed contractors who undertake a range of “microjobs”, something which would not be captured in this data). More interesting, the number of workers with multiple jobs (in all categories) peaked in 1996 at about 5 percent, perhaps as a response to the recession of the early 1990s that saw high levels of unemployment. Overall, the authors conclude, “Secure, permanent, single jobs continue to dominate the labour market, and the traditional challenges of seeking full employment and strong pay growth have not diminished” (Corlett and Finch, 2016, p.22).

3.6 Summary

This chapter has offered an analysis of the sociology of work literature on precarity. It demonstrates instances where this writing rests on the accounts offered by the theorists of transformation and others that offer more empirically grounded positions, and it teases out different elements taken to indicate precarity.

On the basis of this discussion a parsimonious definition of precarity is offered. It is treated as an objective condition, present in work, reflecting the contingency of the relationship between the worker and the employer. This results in a proposition of growing precarity, namely that the extent of precarity has grown in the neoliberal period. Subsequent chapters will test this proposition in the UK context.

In order to carry out this test, two consequences of precarity have been identified. The first involves the growth and generalisation across the labour force of a series of forms of non-standard employment that do not guarantee the continuity of the employment relation. The second, which may be more relevant to countries such as the UK with relatively weakly regulated labour markets and limited employment protection, is the decline of employment tenure. This leads to two subsidiary propositions, each of which structures a chapter below. Chapter six asks whether de-standardised forms of

employment are being more widely used; chapter seven ask if employment tenure in the UK labour market is falling.

Table 3.5: Evolution of non-standard employment

| Period | Trends (economic pattern in italics) |
|---|---|
| The neoliberal turn: 1980-90 | <p><i>Recession 1980-1, followed by growth until the late 1980s. Persistent high unemployment until 1986. Sharp decline in manufacturing employment up to 1985. Rise in service sector employment and, in particular, financial activities from 1984.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dramatic rise in self-employment. Often seen, and promoted by the government as, a rise in entrepreneurship, but giving rise to large number of low income as well as high income self-employed. • Modest increase in agency work. |
| Consolidation of neoliberalism: 1991-2000 | <p><i>Recession 1990-1, followed by growth. Rising unemployment until 1994 when it begins to decline steadily. Another sharp decline in manufacturing up to 1993 and a steady rise in financial activities thereafter.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Modest rise in temporary employment (with a rise in involuntary share of temporary employment up to 1995 and a decline thereafter). • More rapid rise in agency work. • Widespread discussion of the “end of permanent work” and “jobs for life”. • Stable or slightly declining self-employment. |
| The interregnum: 2001-8 | <p><i>Steady but lower levels of growth. Stable, low level of unemployment. Steady decline in manufacturing employment and a rise in service and financial sector employment.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Steady increase in self-employment, especially part-time self-employment. • Stable levels of temporary work. • Slight decline in agency work. |
| Crisis years: 2009-13 | <p><i>Recession 2008-9, followed by weak recovery and austerity drive. Some rise in unemployment, but not to levels seen in wake of early 1980s or 1990s recessions.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sharp rise in reporting of ZHCs, leading to widespread discussion of new forms of employment contract. • Rise in involuntary part-time work and a modest rise in temporary employment. • Rise in agency work, especially among “permanent” agency workers. • Growing academic discourse about precarity and “bogus” self-employment. |
| An uncertain recovery: 2014- | <p><i>Continued weak recovery. Declining unemployment.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fall in involuntary part-time work and a modest fall in temporary employment. • “Temporary” agency work stable; “permanent” agency work continues to rise. • Slowing rise in reporting of ZHCs. • Self-employment appears to stabilise. • Growing interest in the “gig economy”, though little evidence that it is replacing traditional employment on a significant scale. |

Prior work in both areas has been surveyed. Studies of tenure suggest a modest decline or no decline over the period, or even a slight increase, with a countercyclical variation over the business cycle. Differences are identified between male and female tenure, with the latter tending to rise over the period while the former has declined. Some studies conclude that younger workers face a more precarious labour market dominated by contracts offering short-term work.

The vast body of work on non-standard forms of employment is harder to summarise. For convenience, some widely reported trends and views in the literature, related to different forms of non-standard employment, are identified in table 3.5. A rough periodisation is also attempted based on phases of successive economic cycles in the UK (the differential interrelations between successive cycles and employment is considered later).

Some of the specific claims of the literature will be examined in more detail in chapter 6. Nonetheless a few broad themes can be identified at this point. First, it is important to distinguish between forms of employment that genuinely render the employment relationship more contingent and those that do not. Part-time employment cannot, in general, be regarded either as non-standard or inherently precarious. Therefore an examination of part-time employment will be made in chapter 7, in relation to job tenure, rather than in chapter 6.

Second, the literature does not find a consistent rise in temporary employment in the UK according to the standard measures used. However, there may be a rise in forms of agency work, and these may be obscured by people self-defining as permanent workers while in fact working via an agency. Third, there is a relative paucity of research into the growth of zero-hours contracts and on the scale of what has become known as the gig economy. Finally, it is clear that many forms of non-standard employment are used more widely after periods of economic distress, making it necessary to disentangle cyclical and secular patterns in what follows.

4 Perspectives on insecurity

4.1 Introduction

As noted in the preceding chapter, *insecurity* is treated here as a subjective counterpart to precarity. As will become clear, this accords with the term's most widely accepted usage in the literature. In exploring the concept of insecurity, it is not possible to follow the comprehensive approach to pre-existing work used in the case of precarity in chapter 3. The Middlesex University Summon search tool returns well over 120,000 occurrences of the term in journal articles. A single journal, *Work, Employment & Society*, alone has 340 such articles. However, the older pedigree and more established usage of the term mean that an existing body of work already offers productive starting points. In addition, the definition provided for precarity in chapter 3 already excludes some possible usages of insecurity that would simply replicate the former term.

This chapter first considers definitional questions related to insecurity. It then offers a working definition for two distinctive forms of insecurity—job *tenure* insecurity and job *status* insecurity (Gallie et al, 2017)—showing that it is the first of these that is most accurately seen as the subjective counterpart to precarity. Finally, it surveys prior discussions of the evolution of insecurity in employment in the UK, with particular emphasis on drivers of insecurity and the idea that insecurity might be engendered among employees.

4.2 Visions of insecurity

The contribution of Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt (1984) offers a useful starting point. As well as surveying existing literature, the authors develop their own model of what they call *job insecurity*. They treat this as a subjective response derived from an objective threat of the involuntary loss of continuity in some aspect of the job (including the loss of the job itself). In their model, the relevant environmental data leading to insecurity consists of official announcements from employers; “unintended organisational clues”, such as a reduction in orders for parts or raw material; and rumours among employees. They highlight the important distinction between the loss of a job itself and the loss of what employees regard as valuable features of the job. The degree of perceived powerlessness, for instance due to the prevailing culture in the workplace and the presence or absence of unions, also affects the experience of insecurity. The result is that “felt job insecurity” can, for them, be operationalised as the multiplicative combination of “perceived severity of threat” and “perceived powerlessness to resist threats”. They also note the importance of personal characteristics, such as how insecurity-averse individuals are, in moderating how these experiences play out among particular employees.

However, there are three problems with this account. First, missing from it is any consideration of the broader environment outside the workplace, which can also impinge on workers' perceptions. For instance, a recession in which there are widespread job losses might increase people's subjective insecurity, even if the workplace in which they are employed is performing well and there are no threatened job losses. Widely held ideas, even if inaccurate, are not an ephemeral feature of reality that can be written off as mere ignorance or illusion. Not only are these anxieties rooted in material reality, but insecurity, however well it reflects the likelihood of a job being lost, can have consequences for health and wellbeing (Burchell, 2002, p.63). As the young Marx put it, an idea becomes "a material force as soon as it seizes the masses" (Marx, [1844] 1971, p.123).

Second, in practice individual characteristics are not simply psychological qualities that can be attached to individuals but also reflect material differences in circumstances. A worker with several children and an unemployed partner, who is struggling to keep up with her mortgage repayments, is likely to experience the insecurity resulting from a threat to her job rather differently to one whose partner is well paid and who owns her own house. More intense levels of perceived insecurity might simply reflect that it has become harder to find a new job, declining levels of social support during periods of unemployment, the degree of social stigma involved or myriad other problems that people associate with job loss.

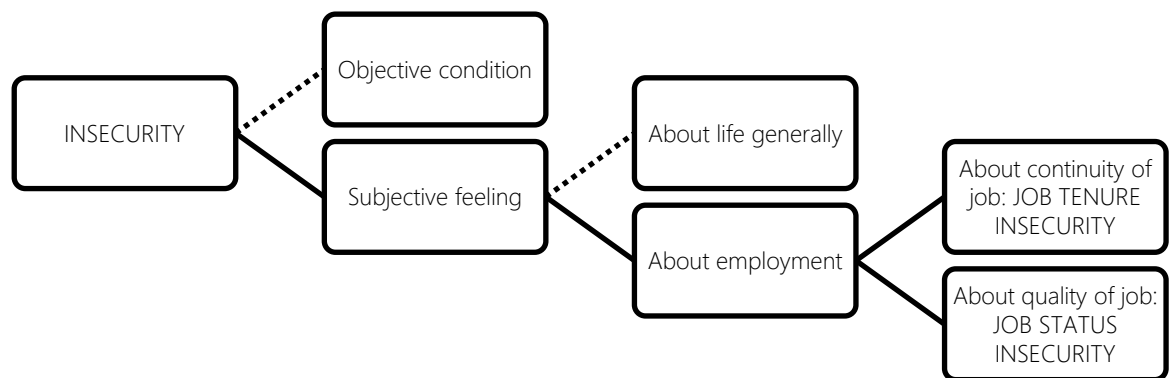
Third, in practice the data available does not measure the factors needed to operationalise Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt's (1984) conception of job insecurity. Instead, employment insecurity has typically been addressed quantitatively through survey data in which workers are simply asked about their perception of their security. That is the case with an important article by Gallie et al (2017, p.37), who treat the Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt as "seminal" but do not directly attempt to operationalise their categories. Gallie et al (2017, p.37) also make a distinction between what they call "job tenure insecurity" and "job status insecurity", arguing convincingly that this is preferable to the distinction between "quantitative" and "qualitative" dimensions identified by Hellgren et al (1999) and Sverke et al (2006). Both aspects of insecurity are both measurable in quantitative terms and have a qualitative component. Job *tenure* insecurity reflects fear of losing a job; job *status* insecurity reflects the loss of valued features of a job.

Gallie et al (2017) also contribute to the literature by identifying, based on prior research, a set of features that are widely regarded as valued by workers, aiding efforts to measure job status insecurity. These include: "personal treatment by one's superiors, the ability to use one's skills, opportunities for individual task discretion, task interest and the level of pay" (Gallie et al, 2017, p.37). Both the distinction between the two types of insecurity and the criteria for job status insecurity are adopted here.

4.3 Towards a definition of insecurity

As with precarity, choices must be made in forming a definition. Figure 4.1 maps this process and, again, solid lines in the diagram denote the choices made. First, insecurity is defined as a subjective phenomenon. This is not to say, of course, that it does not have objective roots. However, it is identified with people's perceptions of their security. Second, insecurity is focused on the world of work: the concern is with people's security about aspects of their employment not their general psychological wellbeing, although the latter impinges upon the former and vice versa. Third, as noted above, two forms of insecurity are identified, related to the continuity of employment and the quality of the job. The subjective counterpart to precarity, which was in the preceding chapter identified with the contingency of the employment relationship, is job tenure insecurity, and this will form the main focus for the analysis in chapter 9. The virtues of separating out a distinctive concept of job status insecurity will become clear from the survey of existing quantitative research below.

Figure 4.1: Conceptual mapping of insecurity



The definitions provided here allow the specification of a *proposition of growing job tenure insecurity*: “Over the neoliberal period in the UK, workers’ fears that the employment relationship may be terminated by their employer have grown.” As with the earlier proposition of growing precarity, this is termed a proposition rather than a hypothesis to avoid suggesting that quantitative tests can straightforwardly establish a binary answer to the question of whether insecurity has grown, a point developed in chapter 5. This proposition can be operationalised through an examination of responses

to survey questions in which workers are asked how insecure their current employment is or how likely they think it is that they will see their employment terminated (though the two questions will not necessarily elicit the same response). Some of the complications involved in measuring insecurity in this way are considered in the following section.

4.4 Studies of insecurity in the UK

Among the theorists of transformation considered in chapter 2, the view is overwhelmingly that people's sense of job tenure insecurity has grown, in line with transformations that have, in actuality, made work more precarious. However, even among theorists critical of the thesis of growing precarity, it is a common opinion that high and rising levels of job tenure insecurity outpace reality. This leads to the view that there is a "paradox of rising long-term employment and persistent employee insecurity" (Doogan, 2001, p.422). Similarly, Mythen (2005, p.135), in an article exploring and criticising some of the hyperbole of Ulrich Beck's concept of the "risk society", nonetheless notes that "Beck's argument speaks to us at the level of everyday experience. For many in the West, work is perceived as a site of instability, risk and insecurity."

4.4.1 *Patterns of job tenure insecurity*

A range of surveys such as the Workplace Employment Relations Survey (WERS) and its predecessors, and the Skills and Employment Survey (SES), ask questions related to job insecurity. The results are sensitive to exactly *what* question is asked, *when* in a particular economic cycle it is asked and *how* it is asked. For these reasons, in chapter 9, where the data is examined independently, the emphasis will be on the broad patterns in each of the sets of data, rather than a quantitative comparison between sets.

Regarding the sensitivity to the economic cycle, there is general agreement that job tenure insecurity grew in the wake of the (2008-9) recession in Britain. The British Social Attitudes survey indicates that the number of employees who believe it would be "easy" or "very easy" to replace them rose from 33 percent in 2005 to 38 percent in 2010 (Park et al, 2012, p.103; Wanrooy et al, 2013a, p.108). According to the WERS, the number of workers who strongly agreed with the statement "I feel my job is secure in this workplace" fell from 67 percent in 2004 to 61 percent in 2011 (Wanrooy et al, 2013b, pp.8-9). This is broadly confirmed by a study of SES data by Gallie and others, the results of which are shown in table 4.1. (Note that the figures in the two columns of the table are *not* exclusive of one another. The left column is the *total* percentage of those who believe themselves to be at risk of losing their job, whereas the right column is the percentage of

the total who feel both that they are at risk of losing their job *and* that this is very or quite likely.) As can be seen in the table, prior to 2012 the question of whether job tenure insecurity was growing, and by how much, depends on how the responses are evaluated. Focusing on those who felt job loss was “very” or “quite” likely presents a different picture to that which emerges if all those who believed there was at least “some risk” of losing their job are considered.

It can be inferred that the 1980s were a period during which relatively large numbers of workers felt *highly* insecure about their jobs, probably to an extent not seen since. By the late 1990s, rising numbers were *somewhat* insecure—a kind of generalised job tenure anxiety—with this fading during the 2000s until it rose to very high levels following the recession (Green, 2007, p.133; Gallie et al, 2017). Yet in the post-recession year of 2012, the numbers feeling job loss was quite or very likely had still not reached 1986 levels. This distinction between acute and generalised job tenure insecurity is developed in chapter 9.

Table 4.1: Perceived risk of losing job

| | Some risk of losing job (%) | Job loss very or quite likely (%) |
|-------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1986 | 20.7 | 9.0 |
| 1997 | 23.2 | 6.8 |
| 2001 | 17.1 | 6.3 |
| 2006 | 18.5 | 5.9 |
| 2012 | 24.9 | 7.0 |

(Source: Gallie et al, 2017)

Overall the changes to insecurity revealed by the data are modest, a variation of only about 4 percent and 2 percent from the mean in the first and second columns respectively. As Brendan Burchell (2002, p.64) writes in an earlier analysis of evidence on insecurity:

At first we were rather surprised...given all the media interest in and policy debates on job insecurity. But, when we reanalysed the data from other studies, we became increasingly convinced that the UK in the 1980s and 1990s had indeed witnessed little *overall* change in job security.

Sometimes cited to demonstrate dramatically rising levels of insecurity in the 1990s is chapter five of the 1997 OECD *Employment Outlook*. This purports to show an astonishing 22 percent drop in people responding favourably in the UK when asked about their employment security, with a steady rise in those not entirely satisfied with their job

security during the 1990s (OECD, 1997, pp.135, 136). However, this analysis has been subjected to a devastating critique by Burchell. He points out that the first claim is supported by data from ISR, a “commercial organisation offering personnel and consultancy services”, which other firms pay to conduct surveys of their employees. In no sense can it be said to “provide a representative or stable sample”. The second claim uses data from the British Household Panel Survey, which in fact shows a generalised shift of the data away from extremes of *both* security and insecurity. The explanation for this may well be changes to the showcard used in the survey, which in 1991 (the starting point for the OECD’s analysis) only labelled the extremes and midpoint. Subsequent years labelled each point on a seven-point scale (Burchell, 2002, p.65). Again, the data appears highly sensitive to how the question is asked.

Levels of insecurity in the UK labour force do not appear to be exceptionally high. “Employment insecurity”, a measure of how insecure people feel regarding being in regular employment, rather than in their current job, was found to be lower in the UK than any of 31 other European countries except the Netherlands and the Scandinavian countries in 2008-9 (Chung and Oorschot, 2011, p.294).

Despite the lack of big aggregate shifts, there were some changes revealed by the Social Change and Economic Life Initiative (SCELI) and SES data examined by Burchell. Between 1986 and 1997, those in manufacturing and sales occupations appeared to experience growing job tenure security, while those in construction, financial services, those in long-term employment and those in self-employment were found to be less secure. However, the biggest change noted was among those in “professional occupations”, who “went from being the most secure workers in 1986 to the most insecure in 1997” (Burchell, 2002, p.66). The implications of this shift are considered in chapter 9.

4.4.2 The weight of consequences

The experience of job tenure insecurity can be affected by changing perceptions of the consequences of job loss, a feature noted by several authors (Nickell et al, 2002, p.2; Auer and Cazes, 2000, p.404). There is evidence that “exit” wages—the wage of those entering unemployment—were higher up the wage distribution in the 2008-9 recession (32 percent of the median compared to 22 percent in 1998 or 24 percent in 2001), which may help explain some of the recent heightened sense of insecurity, especially among professionals (Gregg et al, 2011, p.106). An analysis of data from the New Earnings Survey for male employees by Nickell and others (2002) suggests that unemployment has a fairly persistent effect on earnings—at least for the five years after a spell in unemployment. This factor also seems to increase between the 1980s and 1990s. The “permanent” (after four years) loss of earnings for men following a period of unemployment was 7.8 percent

on average in 1982-6, 13.9 percent for 1987-91 and 15.5 percent for 1992-97 (Nickell et al, 2002, p.15). The impact is particularly pronounced for workers regarded as highly skilled (Nickell et al, 2002, pp.17-18). This earnings impact of unemployment might again help to explain the growing sense of insecurity among professionals. Workers in higher paid occupations, who were more confident than the low paid about finding new jobs if they had to in 1986, were also less confident than the low paid by 1997 (Burchell, 2002, p.66).

There are additional reasons why the fear of unemployment is unevenly distributed through the workforce. As Burchell points out, based on a survey he and others carried out in the late 1990s, “other things being equal, mid-career employees with small children and large mortgages feel more insecure than their older or younger colleagues, not because they overestimate the probability of redundancy but because they are more worried about the impact such an event would have upon their lives” (Burchell, 2002, p.71). In principle, focusing on survey questions that ask about the likelihood of losing a job rather than the consequences ought to minimise this effect.

4.4.3 Drivers of insecurity

Fears of job loss are almost always exaggerated, especially when fears run highest. By the late 1990s only about “seven in every 1,000 employees” actually experienced redundancy, compared with fear of redundancy standing between 25 and 50 percent (Doogan, 2001, p.436). However, that does not necessarily mean that job tenure insecurity does not track the real prospect of a job being lost (Dickerson and Green, 2012, pp.198-199, 202).

WERS data shows little evidence, based on a regression analysis of data from 1998, of any significant correlation between feelings of job tenure insecurity and job tenure (Mumford and Smith, 2004, p.288). This though is unsurprising. It was noted in section 3.4 above that job tenure is generally counter-cyclical, whereas the evidence is that job tenure insecurity is highest in periods of high unemployment. It is more likely that insecurity tracks the level of *involuntary* job losses. For instance, the modest peak in feelings of generalised job tenure insecurity in the late 1990s may reflect the fact that involuntary job losses rose from 1977 to 1997, after which the figure began to fall (Turnbull and Wass, 2000; Lapido and Wilkinson, 2002, pp.24-25; Nomis, 2011). To this degree, the fears are exaggerated but their waxing and waning remain quite well rooted in the prospect of involuntarily losing a job. This possibility—that job tenure insecurity in fact accurately gauges the likelihood of job loss—is tested in chapter 9.

Beyond these shifts in the actual likelihood of continued employment, there are other broad categories of driver for anxieties regarding job security. On the one hand, there are

what can be termed *ideological* drivers, such as media reporting or word of mouth, a category encompassing Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt's (1984) drivers but broadened to include influences beyond the workplace. On the other hand, insecurity could be viewed as an unintended consequence of *material* drivers, such as the intensification of work, factors that are experienced directly by the worker in employment but do not in actuality affect job tenure. However, it will be seen below that many of the factors regarded as engendering insecurity are neither straightforwardly ideological nor material. They instead represent a broader imposition of the prerogatives of market competition on society along with the associated ideology of flexibility within the workplace.

Auer and Cazes (2000) touch on a number of possible ideological drivers. The media "usually construct generalised 'facts' from scarce evidence of a few micro-level cases". "Research, too, especially on non-standard work arrangements, has greatly contributed to building up the image of an unstable and flexible labour market" in which inferences are made about the overall labour market from a few areas. Additionally, "new categories of skilled, white-collar workers—those with a voice—have also experienced job losses" (Auer and Cazes, 2000, p.404). Indeed, as has been seen, from the 1990s, in contrast with the mid-1980s, job tenure insecurity has been experienced by all occupational groupings, including those in managerial and professional roles (Gallie et al, 2017, p.15). This higher profile for the impact of job losses may be a relevant factor. Certainly the media seems to amplify the notion of insecurity. Fevre (2007, p.519) notes that "in 1996 there were 2,778 stories about insecurity in general in British national newspapers and 977 on job insecurity in particular, whereas in 1986—when unemployment was much higher, incidentally—the figures were 234 and 10".

Turning to more obviously material shifts, changes in the workplace itself, which in fact increase job *status* insecurity, could be interpreted as increasing job *tenure* insecurity, either because the data is misinterpreted or because workers themselves express one form of insecurity as the other.

While working hours fell slightly in the UK from the mid-1990s, in the 1990s an intensification of work effort occurred. Data from the European Working Conditions Survey suggests that from 1991 to 1996 the UK saw among the largest percentage changes in workers reporting that they often had to work at speed or to tight deadlines. Between 1992 and 2001 the number of employees reporting that they worried about their jobs after work rose from 12.7 percent to 17.8 percent; the proportion who found it "difficult to unwind" rose from 14.6 to 17.5 percent (Burchell, 2002, pp.73-74; Overell et al, 2010, p.68). A careful analysis of work effort by Francis Green concludes: "work in Britain was being intensified, especially in manufacturing, in the 1980s"; this process seems to have continued through the "first part of the 1990s". However, by the end of the

1990s “work intensification had apparently reached the point of satiation: there were no further increases in work effort over the 1997 to 2001 period” (Green, 2007, p.64).

A more recent survey of job quality by Green divides the various indicators into extrinsic and intrinsic factors. The first category, including real pay, the prevalence of holiday entitlement and the hours worked have, in general, improved since the late 1990s, at least until the recession of 2008-9 (Green, 2011, pp.115-118). Intrinsic factors deteriorated in the 1990s. The level of workplace autonomy, measured by the task discretionary index, declined substantially from 1992 to 2001, especially “at either end of the spectrum; among elementary occupations but also among professionals” before levelling out in the 2000s. The reasons are unclear, but probably lie in changes to “management culture”, rather than technological changes (Green, 2011, pp.122-123). Again, work intensity, having risen sharply in the 1990s, subsequently stabilised at high levels according to the relevant indicators. Self-reported “ill-health entailing stress and related conditioned doubled” from 1990 to 1998-9 (Green, 2011, p.124).

Recent evidence from WERS suggests that job tenure insecurity is also strongly linked to the number of changes in the workplace as a result of the 2008-9 recession. These changes might include, in order of prevalence: wages freezes/cuts, increased workloads, the reorganisation of work, restrictions to paid overtime, reduced access to training, reductions to non-wage benefits, being moved to another job, reductions to hours and enforced unpaid leave. Where none of these changes had been made, an average of 72 percent of workers strongly agreed that they felt secure in their workplace. Where four or more of the changes had been made, this fell to 31 percent, and 43 percent now strongly disagreed with the statement (Wanrooy et al, 2013b, pp.8-9). Changes of these kinds (with the exception of reducing basic hours) were most likely in public sector workplaces and here a lack of a perception of security was particularly pronounced (Wanrooy et al, 2013a, pp.20, 109).

As noted above, if changes in the workplace and the growing intensity of work feed insecurity, it is possible that some of this might be expressed as apparent job tenure insecurity. Burchell points out that in a survey he helped to conduct in the late 1990s some 40 percent of those who thought it was “unlikely” that they would lose their job nonetheless “described their jobs as ‘very insecure’, ‘insecure’ or ‘neither secure nor insecure’” (Burchell, 2002, p.70).

This motivates the attempt to disentangle job status insecurity from job tenure insecurity. Job status insecurity since the recession is particularly pronounced among those outside of managerial or professional occupations, but does not vary much with age, local labour market conditions, contract type or the use of high technology (Gallie et al, 2017, pp.9-11). The same research found that “human resources management practices”

strongly affect job status insecurity (but not job tenure insecurity), and that employee participation ameliorated job status insecurity to a degree, but that union recognition had no strong effect (Gallie et al, 2017, p.11). Furthermore, changes in work organisation strongly impacted upon job status insecurity but did not affect job tenure insecurity (Gallie et al, 2017, p.13). Table 4.2 shows selected indicators of anxiety at work. However, this data needs to be treated with caution. Whereas the 2012 data is from the Skills and Employment Survey, the 2000 data is from a separate survey, “Working in Britain”.

The more detailed picture in 2012 (when additional questions were asked in the Skills and Employment Survey) reveals that the biggest fears are of reductions to pay (37.9 percent very or fairly anxious), less say in the job (31.5) and skill reductions (24.9). These fears are each at least as prevalent as those who feel at some risk of losing their job, which was reported by 24.9 percent of workers. In other words, some forms of job status insecurity appear to be more prevalent than job tenure insecurity.

Table 4.2: Anxieties at work

| % very or fairly anxious about: | 2000 | 2012 |
|--|-------------|-------------|
| Arbitrary dismissal | 20.6 | 24.1 |
| Discrimination | 17.2 | 18.4 |
| Victimisation by management | 15.9 | 19.3 |

(Source: Gallie et al, 2017)

However, it would be wrong to suggest a straightforward division between ideological and material factors. Doogan (2001, p.436) emphasises another dimension of insecurity: “greater exposure of employees to market forces, the impact of the intensification of the labour process and a loss of status and control at work”. These are contextualised in a wider shift encompassing material and ideological factors. He argues that insecurity is engendered by “the changed circumstances and market environment in which people work and in the political and ideological construction of insecurity” (Doogan, 2001, p.435). He identifies this with *precarity* in one of the senses in which it was used within French social theory, discussed in section 2.4, referring to “exogenous uncertainty of the economic environment and the insecurity generated by turbulent market conditions” (Doogan, 2015, p.59).

Bourdieu’s notion of precarity itself passes through various stages, dating back in its first formulation to his early writing on Algeria in the 1960s (Bourdieu, 1963; see Schierup and Jørgensen, 2016, and Atkinson, 2013). The mature use of the term is clear from the collection of interventions into social movements published in French in 1998 as

Contre-feux and translated the same year into English as *Acts of Resistance*. Here, Bourdieu's (1998, p.82) initial discussion of insecurity and precarity is unremarkable: "It has emerged clearly that job security is now everywhere: in the private sector, but also in the public sector, which has greatly increased the number of temporary, part-time or casual positions; in industry, but also in the institutions of cultural production and diffusion... Casualisation profoundly affects the person who suffers it..." More interesting is what follows:

Added to these effects of precariousness on those directly touched by it there are the effects on all the others, who are apparently spared. The awareness of it never goes away: it is present at every moment in everyone's mind... So insecurity acts directly on those it touches...and indirectly on all the others, through the fear it arouses, which is methodologically exploited by all the *insecurity-inducing strategies*, such as the introduction of notorious "flexibility"...which...is inspired as much by political as economic reasons. One thus begins to suspect that insecurity is the product not of *economic* inevitability, identified with the much-heralded "globalisation", but a *political will*. A "flexible" company in a sense deliberately exploits a situation of insecurity which it helps to reinforce... Casualisation of employment is part of a mode of domination of a new kind, based on the creation of a permanent state of insecurity aimed at forcing workers into submission, into the acceptance of exploitation...the very appropriate and expressive concept of *flexploitation*...evokes very well this rational management of insecurity (Bourdieu, 1998, pp.82-85).

Bourdieu's suspicion, of the emergence of a system of insecurity, manipulated and hence reinforced by firms, and congenial to, and so encouraged by, wider political and economic elites, can be detached from the specific question of whether and where precarity, as defined in the preceding chapter, has grown. Instead it can be understood on the terrain of the material and ideational factors affecting employees in the context of neoliberalism.

This view is not unique to Bourdieu. Here it is useful to return to the critique of notions of the flexible firm discussed in section 2.6. Anna Pollert, introducing a book collection of sceptical writings on flexibility, argues that the ideational thrust of flexibility has now become a material force:

Flexibility as a concept has gained hegemony along with the contemporary preoccupation with the market. It has acquired the presence of a fetish... Nevertheless, in the process of its dissemination, the concept has become a material force in the policy language of governments and employers; and in practice, in legislation, in the booming management consultancy business and in industrial relations bargaining. Thus, its huge ideological influence needs to be recognised as a reality (Pollert, 1991b, p.xvii).

In the same collection on the flexibility debate, a different author, Richard Hyman (1991, pp.281-282) highlights both the ideological element to the debate and the wider context of uncertainty heralded by neoliberalism concludes:

[T]he issue is not rigidity versus flexibility but what *kinds* of rigidity... Here the ideological dimension is of crucial importance, for a key influence on the discourse of flexibility is *who gains or loses* from a particular set of institutional arrangements... Moreover, the multiple sources of instability in national and international economic relations offer the prospect of a sustained phase of disturbance and disruption. Flexibilisation is therefore not simply a one-off process of removing a set of entrenched rigidities, but also a means of adapting institutions and expectations to the certainty of uncertainty.

Finally, lest the claim that insecurity is sometimes deliberately and consciously engendered by employers seems overly conspiratorial, Bronfenbrenner (2000) has produced a detailed study of the way both capital mobility and, more importantly, the threat of capital mobility played a role in negotiations between private firms and unions in US industry. It demonstrates the enormous effectiveness of threatened plant closures during unionisation drives—and that “after the [union] election, employers followed through on the threat and shut down all or part of their facilities in fewer than 3 percent of the campaigns where threats were made” (Bronfenbrenner, 2000, p.vii).

4.5 Summary

This chapter has sought to provide a definition of insecurity that can be operationalised in the analysis below. Insecurity is defined as a subjective condition, present in work, and is further divided into two categories. Job tenure insecurity reflects the fear that workers feel that they may lose their job and is the subjective counterpart to precarity. A second form of insecurity, job status insecurity, reflects the fear that valued features of a job will be lost. The proposition of growing job tenure insecurity is tested in chapter 9 below.

Prior studies of both forms of insecurity in the UK have been surveyed. Overall, job tenure insecurity appears to fluctuate modestly according to economic conditions. The most acute forms of insecurity, in which people strongly believe they are likely to lose their job, seem to have peaked in the 1980s, whereas a more generalised insecurity, in which people think job loss is quite likely, peaks in the period following the recession of 2008-9. There is some evidence for a rise in job status insecurity over the period from 2000, though the data on this is limited and there are fewer studies of this form of insecurity. Finally, different drivers of insecurity have been explored, with an emphasis on the notion, derived from Bourdieu and other authors, of neoliberalism as a period in which insecurity is engendered among workers to render them more easily exploitable.

5 Methodology

5.1 Introduction

This chapter explores how the broad research themes and questions discussed in the introduction to this thesis can be concretised. As has already been noted in chapters 1 and 2, much of the literature associated with the theorists of transformation is characterised by a paucity of empirical data. The literature surveyed in chapters 3 and 4, dealing with precarity and insecurity in employment, partially answers this criticism. However, it does not definitively resolve the question of whether precarity and insecurity have increased or decreased over the neoliberal period in the UK labour force.

Section 5.2 sets out formally the research propositions derived from the review of previous literature, which are to be tested in chapters 6, 7 and 9 of this thesis. Section 5.3 considers the range of sources of data used to test the propositions. However, the approach taken here, a primarily quantitative survey of aggregate data has inbuilt limitations. These are set out in section 5.4, followed by a brief statement of ethical considerations in section 5.5.

Finally, section 5.6 discusses the validity of the approach taken towards the data and the resulting need for theoretical innovation, particular as regards the theory of labour markets, a challenge taken up in chapter 8.

5.2 Research propositions

The key questions at stake in this thesis have, for the sake of clarity of exposition, been expressed in two propositions, with two attendant subsidiary propositions for the first. The propositions, derived in chapters 3 and 4, are here set out formally.

- The proposition of growing precarity: “Over the neoliberal period in the UK, the employment relationship has become, objectively, more contingent.”
 - A subsidiary proposition of growing de-standardisation: “Over the neoliberal period in the UK, there has been a growth and generalisation across the labour force of a range of non-standard forms of employment that make the employment relationship, objectively, more contingent.”
 - A subsidiary proposition of declining employment tenure: “Over the neoliberal period in the UK, there has been a secular decline in employment tenure.”
- The proposition of growing job tenure insecurity: “Over the neoliberal period in the UK, workers’ fears that the employment relationship may be terminated by their employer have grown.”

These are deliberately termed *propositions* rather than *hypotheses*. The latter term suggests a positivist approach to the data in which some quantitative procedure yields a binary answer to the questions at stake. Instead it is expected here that the interplay of abstract tendencies and countertendencies will generate concrete patterns of development. This does not simply mean an intermediate outcome, the algebraic sum of the results of the tendencies and countertendencies. Rather, the way in which they interact may itself be generative of particular patterns of evolution of employment in which, for instance, precarity may be found to coexist with stability in novel ways, requiring new theorisations.

5.3 Approach to the data

Having established the propositions to be tested, it remains necessary to consider the data that will be used to perform the testing and the methods employed.

The ideal way to study the research propositions might be to gather data through a survey of the labour force across the UK. This approach is impractical for several reasons. First, the scale of data collection necessary to test the propositions is considerable, requiring thousands or tens of thousands of interviews to draw meaningful conclusions, well beyond the resources available. Second, the scope of the research would have to encompass every major field of employment across every region of the country. Third, as the investigation involves the evolution of the labour force, historical data is required, and although it is hypothetically possible to ask people about their prior working life, this would introduce the problem of recall bias as well as selection bias as some of those employed in the past would now be dead. Instead, the approach taken here is to use pre-existing large-scale surveys. The data sources used are given in table 5.1.

Because many different surveys are used, their adequacy in answering the questions posed is discussed in more detail in the thesis at appropriate points. The Labour Force Survey is discussed briefly in section 6.1 and then in more detail, along with the General Household Survey, in section 7.2. The other surveys used to measure insecurity are discussed in section 9.2.

Here some more general methodological points about the use of secondary data from such surveys are offered.

Research using secondary data has the disadvantage that the researcher does not choose the questions asked. The objectives of the researcher may be quite different from the purposes for which the survey was originally designed. Furthermore, when surveys are used to measure changes to employment relations, the emergence of novel forms of work may pose a problem because surveys tend to develop a degree of conservatism, in which

particular areas of inquiry are only periodically reviewed, lagging behind social changes. This motivates an additional research question, in addition to those based on the propositions set out above: to what extent is the survey data available in the UK adequate to answering the kind of questions posed here about precarity and insecurity? Where the data currently available falls short of this goal, recommendations are made as to how the situation could be improved. These results are summarised in section 10.5.

Table 5.1: Main surveys used in the thesis

| Survey <i>*name changes between iterations</i> | Approximate sample size | Period covered | Agencies responsible |
|--|--------------------------------|-----------------------|---|
| Labour Force Survey | 95,000 | 1973- | Office for National Statistics |
| General Household Survey | 21,000 | 1971-2007 | Office for National Statistics |
| Skills and Employment Survey* | 3,200 | 1986-2012 | Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES) |
| Workplace Employment Relations Survey* | 22,000 | 1980-2011 | Department for Business, Innovation and Skills; ESRC; Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service; UKCES; and National Institute of Economic and Social Research |
| British Social Attitudes | 3,000 | 1983- | NatCen Social Research |
| British Household Panel Survey | 10,000 | 1991-2009 | Institute for Social and Economic Research and ESRC |

In principle, the scope of the research could be broadened to encompass other countries, offering a comparative perspective on precarity and insecurity. That approach has not been taken here. There are several reasons. First, if the scope of research were broadened, the range of issues investigated and the depth to which they could be studied would necessarily be curtailed. There are advantages to a more comprehensive account of a specific country's labour force. The extent to which the findings can be generalised is arguable, but, as noted in the introduction, the UK has been seen as the epitome of a society transformed by neoliberalism. At the very least a negative result would weaken the automatic association between neoliberalism and precarity across the advanced capitalist states claimed by many of the writers considered in chapter 2. Second, focusing on a single country avoids the problem of having to compare disparate datasets collected by different agencies using differing definitions. This is, in fact, an issue even for the UK-wide data. In some instances here it has been necessary to exclude Northern Ireland from the analysis because data from that area is not included or is collected in a different

manner to that from in Britain. Third, the UK is chosen because of the researcher's personal familiarity with this society.

The historical scope of the research reflects the focus on the neoliberal period. As noted in the introduction, in the UK it is convenient to date this from the first Margaret Thatcher government (1979-83), which began to impose a neoliberal policy regime in a thoroughgoing manner. However, as table 5.1 shows, the some of the surveys used antedate the start of this neoliberal period. Even those that do not, such as the Labour Force Survey, have limitations in their early years. That survey, for instance, is initially biennial, with the move to annual surveys coming only in 1984. The end point for the data used is December 2015. An earlier date would limit the ability of the research to take into account the recovery from the 2008-9 recession; a later one would necessitate repeated updating of the analysis to account for the availability of new data.

Once obtained, the data was analysed using the *Stata* software package, a standard statistical suite used across the social sciences. *Stata* was deemed more versatile and more capable of handling very large data sets than *SPSS*, which was initially trialled.

With the exception of the British Household Panel Survey, the surveys offer cross-sectional data for given years. Much of the time spent on the analysis involved manipulating this cross-sectional data into a form in which the evolution of the labour market could be traced. This confronted considerable difficulties. For instance, the name and possible values of the variable for a category as straightforward as *marital status* change twice in the Labour Force Survey from 1992 to 2015. Changes prior to 1992 are even more frequent. For categories such as *occupation* or *industry* there are far bigger changes to the way in which classification takes place. Even changes between upper and lower cases for variable names required additional manipulation of the data. Extremely extensive scripts were written in *Stata's* programming language to draw together this data in a consistent form.

In total 110 different *Stata* scripts were created to assemble the data and perform the analysis. These ranged from just eight to 2,966 lines of code, with the latter script used to generate a single data file containing data on employment status from the Labour Force Survey from 1984 to 2015.

Once the data had been processed, generating usable datasets covering as much of the neoliberal period as possible, the analysis largely took the form of presenting the evolution of the data graphically. Regression analysis was not used. In the absence of "nearly right model" for the various questions being explored, regression would allow only descriptions of and inferences about the data to be made (Berk, 2010). The advantages over the method applied here are limited, and the technical challenges of using regression on data assembled from a series of separate cross-sections are

considerable, especially if a wide range of different surveys with complex designs are to be used. Furthermore, in a field in which claims are often advanced with the force of common sense there is much to be said for presenting data in a visual format that is clear and accessible to non-specialist audiences. Where the data did not lend itself to presentation in graphical form, for instance where there are few data points, tables were used instead.

5.4 Limitations

Along with the strengths of the approach used here, there are a range of limitations, which are worth indicating both to make clear the scope of the conclusions and to suggest additional areas for future work. One limitation, the exclusive focus on the UK, has already been noted in section 5.3. There is, however, no reason in principle why the approach taken here could not be replicated for other countries for which similar data is available.

Another limitation is the potential inadequacy of the data itself. In addition to the potential for surveys to fail to ask the “right” questions, there are other limitations to such surveys. The most obvious is that surveys of employees are never entirely an *objective* measure of the phenomena under investigation. For instance, in the Labour Force Survey, workers are asked if there was “some way” in which their employment “was non-permanent”. This clearly involves a degree of subjectivity, as different workers will have different views on what makes a job non-permanent. There is always a danger in this kind of research that results appear to take on an objectivity they do not in fact deserve. In the analysis to come, efforts have been made to take into account these problems, which are inherent in surveying workers. In chapter 9 it is precisely a subjective factor—insecurity—that is being measured, and here care is taken to disentangle the different objective drives which can lead to particular views developing among employees.

By far the biggest limitation of this research is in the focus on quantitative questions. There is no desire here to fetishise quantitative research; both quantitative and qualitative approaches are valid ways of grasping reality. The view taken here is certainly not that the nature of insecurity in the contemporary workplace, for instance, can be read off from the quantitative survey data considered in chapter 9. It is necessary to supplement this with qualitative studies that can capture the nuance of workers’ views and how they have evolved over time. Similarly, while it is important to try to understand whether, on aggregate, precarity has risen or fallen across the labour force, this is a crude index of a much more variegated and complex evolution of employment relations. Capturing the experience of particular groups of workers is important. However, the focus here is justified by the relative paucity of quantitative studies of precarity and insecurity covering a particular national labour force as a whole.

Finally, limits of time and the length of the thesis precluded any study of the regional aspect of the evolution of precarity and insecurity. Given the unevenness of the UK labour market (see, for instance, Monastiriotis, 2005), this is a gap that deserves to be filled by subsequent research in this area.

5.5 Ethical considerations

The ethical considerations in this thesis are limited compared to those involving data collection. The data used here was obtained under the licensing conditions of the UK Data Service. Undertakings were given to store the data responsibly and to destroy it once the project was completed. Some recent datasets from the General Lifestyle Survey, the successor to the General Household Survey, were obtained under special license conditions. However, these were quickly found to be unsuitable for the analysis here and were promptly destroyed as required by the conditions.

In recent years, research ethics have increasingly been linked to the quality of research, with, for instance, the Economic and Social Research Council making this a principle of its ethical framework (Bryman, 2008, p.127). The adequacy of the research design is supported by the discussion in earlier sections of this chapter.

Finally, the stance of the researcher, one of personal commitment to classical Marxism, might be deemed a potential source of bias. Indeed, if classical Marxism is taken seriously, it must be viewed not simply as an epistemology or ontology, but also as providing a normative framework linked to the principle of proletarian self-emancipation (Blackledge, 2012). However, as Darlington and Dobson (2013) note, in the context of a discussion of industrial relations, partisanship is both unavoidable in the social sciences and need not necessarily lead to bias, provided investigations are rooted in scientific methods of enquiry and conducted with a suitable degree of self-critical examination of the investigator's values. They describe some of the advances in the field that have come as a result of partisan research.

Care is taken here to set out the results of the investigation in an accessible form so that their correspondence with reality can be tested independently by other researchers. Furthermore, the theorisation of labour markets, presented in chapter 8, represents an attempt to ground a classical Marxist analysis of labour markets in the foregoing empirical results, rather than offering it as free-standing theory.

5.6 Data validity and theoretical innovation

To anticipate somewhat the findings of this thesis, chapters 6 and 7 will present a picture of the UK labour force that would appear counterintuitive to many of the theorists of transformation discussed in chapter 2, and to many researchers involved in the sociology of work and related disciplines. There are several reasons for confidence in the validity of these findings. First, the survey data used in chapters 6 and 7 is from the largest and most widely used surveys of the UK labour force in existence. The post-1991 iterations of the Labour Force Survey in particular are the gold standard of such surveys. They are the official source of employment data in the UK and are widely used by researchers. The methodology employed in gathering this data is available for scrutiny from independent researchers and is regularly reviewed (see Werner, 2006); the Labour Force Survey is also subject to regular performance and quality monitoring, in consultation with users. While Alan Felstead (2009, p.31) identifies areas in which the Labour Force Survey lacks coverage, he nonetheless notes that such official surveys “have several advantages. Most notably, they have large samples of respondents, they are frequently carried out, the results are published as headline findings, and the datasets are quickly made available for secondary analysis and independent scrutiny.” In particular the survey meets the criteria set out by the National Statistician for high quality statistical data, namely that it be *timely, reliable and coherent*:

Timely statistics are required because policy makers are taking decisions which affect the economy with a lag. The earlier they get estimates of the current and recent position of the economy, the better informed their decisions should be. Of course, timely estimates also need to be reliable in the sense that they are not subject to large revision. Economic statistics also need to be coherent, that is, consistent with each other and with other information (Dunnell, 2008, p.19).

In the investigation of the evolution of employment tenure, the emphasis prior to 1992 is on the General Household Survey, but the evolution of this time series can be checked against the Labour Force Survey, as has been attempted by other researchers (Gregg and Wadsworth, 1995). It is shown here that there is a general correspondence between these datasets, with only minor variations for most years. Where the data overlaps, the Labour Force Survey is preferred.

The surveys used to study insecurity are potentially more problematic, because they are undertaken by agencies other than the Office for National Statistics. They tend to be more infrequent, making analysis of historical trends less fine-grained. They also tend to be based on smaller sample sizes making them less robust and reliable (Felstead, 2009, p.16). This is partially addressed in chapter 9 by employing an approach that examines comparable indicators in different surveys in parallel. The consistency of the overall

evolution of the trends in insecurity should give greater confidence in the findings, while also limiting anomalous results due to small sample size and filling in some of the missing detail that would be absent if just a single survey were used.

If the findings are valid, and if they challenge the assumptions of much of the preceding literature, then theoretical innovation is required in order to make sense of the results of the investigation. This is attempted, first, in chapter 8, which re-examines the nature of labour markets in the context of the findings, employing a classical Marxist approach and drawing on a range of writers operating in this tradition. On the question of subjective insecurity in work, chapter 9 returns to some of the themes identified in the literature in chapter 4, to propose an explanation for the drivers of employment insecurity.

5.7 Summary

This chapter has presented the methodology to be used in the thesis and explained how the data will be approached in order to address the research questions. In particular, the propositions and subsidiary propositions will be tested by a quantitative approach using data from a range of large-scale surveys from the UK. The validity of the data and methods used has been defended, while the limitations inherent in the approach taken are also detailed.

The empirical analysis of the data, and the theoretical explanations for the trends revealed, forms the content of the subsequent four chapters. As part of that inquiry, the adequacy or otherwise of the existing survey data to answer questions related to precarity and insecurity will also be considered.

6 Is work being de-standardised?

6.1 Introduction

One possible outcome, identified in chapter 3, if the proposition of growing precarity is true, is the emergence and generalisation across the labour force of an array of non-standard contracts. This subsidiary proposition has been set out as follows: “Over the neoliberal period in the UK, there has been a growth and generalisation across the labour force of a range of non-standard forms of employment that make the employment relationship, objectively, more contingent.” The purpose of the current chapter is to test this proposition.

Drawing on the survey of the literature on non-standard forms of employment in chapter 3, several relevant types of non-standard work can be identified:

- Temporary work, of various kinds.
- Agency work not included in the standard measures of temporary employment.
- Zero-hours contracts (ZHCs).
- Self-employment where it is potentially false self-employment or linked to the emergence of the so-called “gig economy”.

As well as considering the extent of these forms of work, their concentration within particular sectors and among particular demographics is explored.

In order to obtain consistent time series, the Labour Force Survey (LFS) is the main source of data throughout this chapter. Until 1983 the LFS was biennial, so it is helpful to start the analysis in 1984 to avoid the need for interpolation. Where the LFS is quarterly (from 1992) the second quarter (Q2) or fourth quarter (Q4) data is used, depending on the question posed. Although many questions are asked across all four quarters, some are asked only in certain quarters, in particular those pertaining to ZHCs.

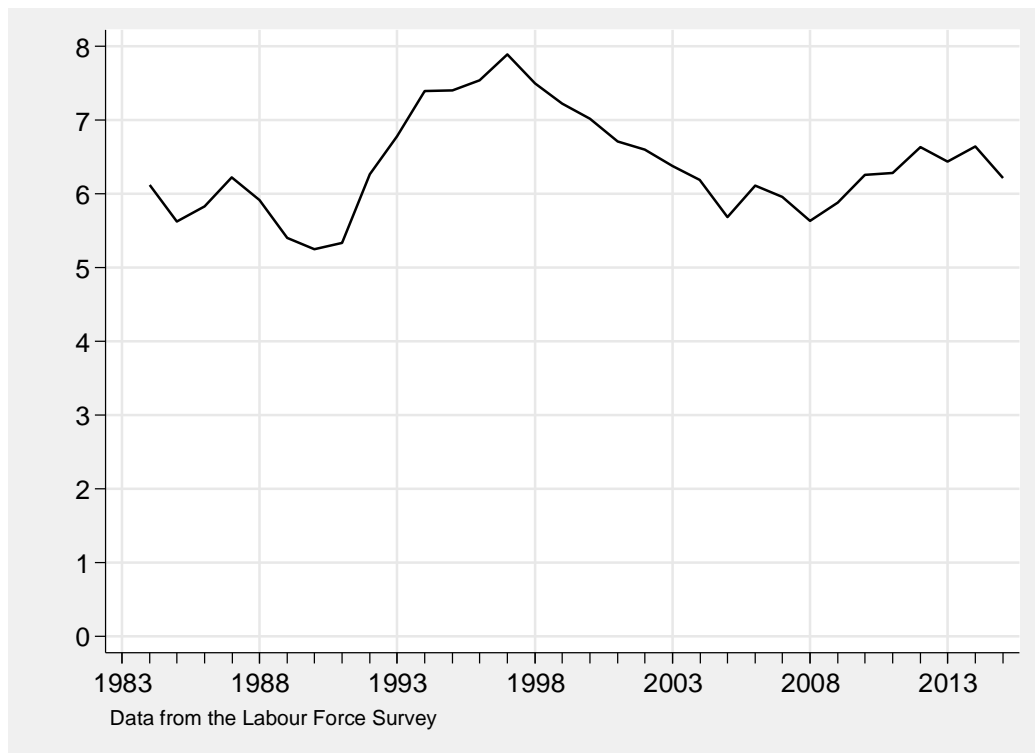
The LFS originated as an Office for National Statistics survey of private households, and has now become the largest such survey in the UK. Households are randomly sampled across the UK. From 1984-91 the sample consisted of 15,000 private households in Great Britain with a “boost” of 44,000 households in Great Britain and 5,200 households in Northern Ireland in March-May. From 1992, the Great Britain sample was expanded to 60,000 households each quarter, with 3,000 households added in Northern Ireland from the end of 1994. Those in NHS accommodation and student accommodation were also added from 1992. Finally, a panel design was initiated, in which a fifth of the panel is replaced each quarter, with individuals remaining in the sample for five quarters (ONS, 2011, pp.3-4, 9). Today the LFS, which is weighted to produce a representative sample of the UK population as a whole, is the standard survey used in official measures of employment.

6.2 Temporary contracts

An upsurge in temporary employment would, according to the definition developed in chapter 3, indicate a growth in precarity. However, there has been no such upsurge, at least as measured by the LFS, in recent decades. Figure 6.1 shows the level of temporary employment since 1984. The total figure is currently about 6 percent of the employed labour force, less than during the heyday of temporary employment in the mid-1990s and roughly the same as in 1984.

As Fevre (2007) notes, the question in the survey (from 1992 to 2010)—“Leaving aside your own personal intensions and circumstances, was your job a permanent job or was there some way it was non-permanent?”—is a broad one that may even overestimate the extent of temporary contracts, as individuals may consider their work temporary despite having permanent status. Only those having already said that their work is non-permanent in some way are asked *how* it is non-permanent. By 2010, 12 percent of those declaring their work to be “non-permanent” said it was non-permanent is “some other way”, aside from casual, seasonal or fixed-term work. In this sense, the division between subjective perceptions of job tenure insecurity and its objective counterpart of precarity are not as clear-cut as might be hoped.

Figure 6.1: Temporary employment (1984-2015)



The difficulty of establishing the *form* of temporary work is shown by comparing the data from 1992 with that in the earlier phase of the LFS, when interviewees were asked to select from three categories: “a permanent job”, “a seasonal, temporary or casual job” and “a job done under contract of for a fixed period of time”. The third of these categories accounts for 27.5 percent of temporary employees in the 1991 data, but the following year the equivalent category leaps to 47.2 percent. Large numbers of interviewees seem to have opted for the catchall category of seasonal/temporary/casual employment prior to 1992, making this data less reliable. Furthermore, the fact that prior to 1992 interviewees were asked to specify a way in which the job was non-permanent from the outset, rather than being told to choose from permanent and “non-permanent in some way”, necessarily leads to a discontinuity in the data. This is particularly unfortunate given that the UK was in the process of emerging from a major recession at this time, making it hard to distinguish changes due to discontinuities in the survey question and those brought about by economic shifts.

Figure 6.2: Breakdown of temporary employment (1992-2015)

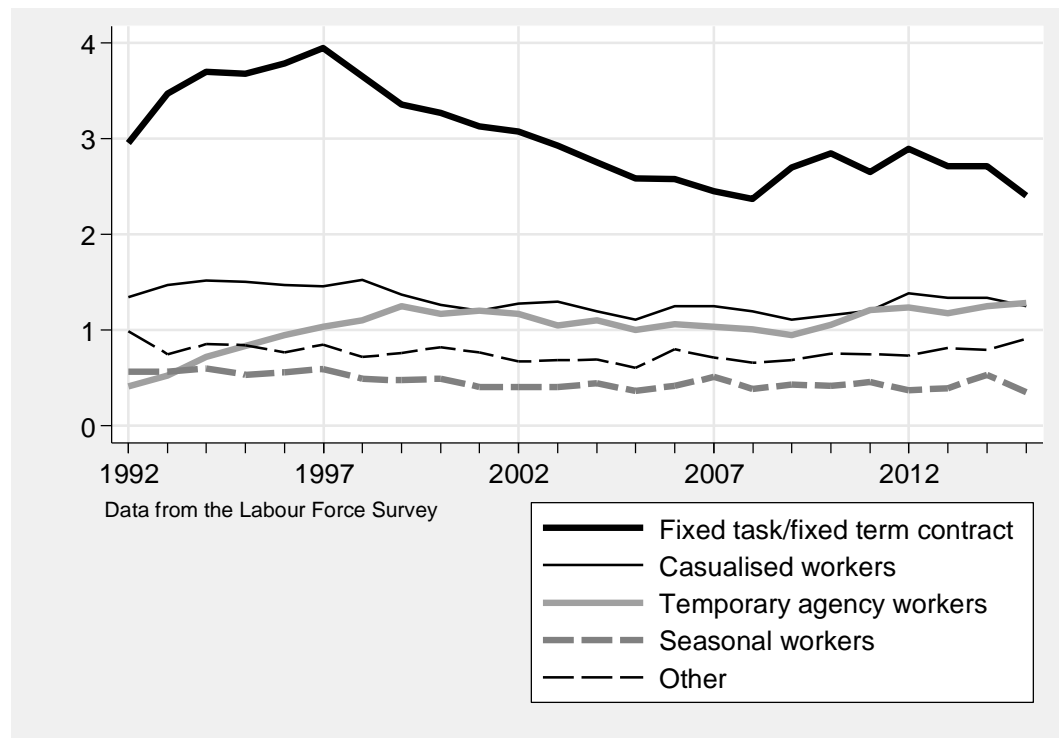
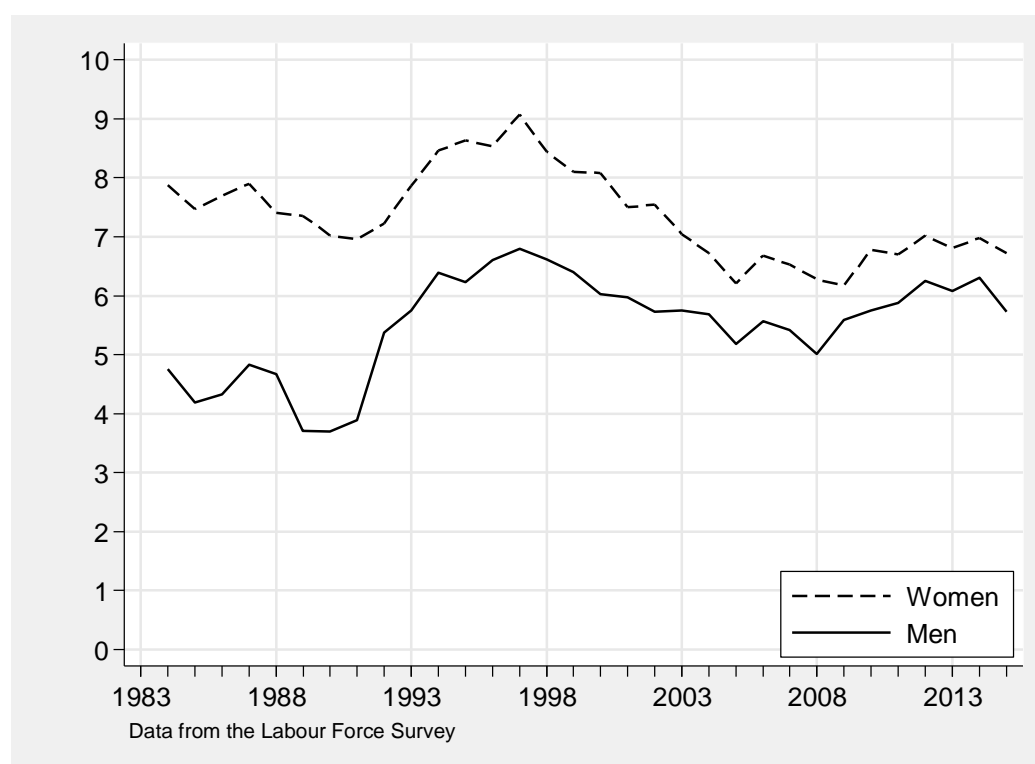


Figure 6.2 offers a breakdown of the reasons given for non-permanency from 1992 to 2015. (From 2011 to 2015, interviewees were given the option of listing a range of reasons why their job is non-permanent. However, 95.5 percent of these interviewees, having listed one reason why their job is non-permanent, decline to list a second, and so it

is not unreasonable to rely solely on the main reason why work was temporary for this period.) Two clear trends are evident. The first is a decline in fixed term/fixed task contracts, at least until the economic crisis after which this category begins to rise and then declines again. This suggests that temporary work increases in the wake of recessions, leading to rises for about four years after 1990-1 and 2008-9. The likely reason is that employers are wary of taking on permanent staff in the early phases of recovery; once the recovery beds in, temporary employment is replaced by permanent. The second trend visible in the graph is an increase in temporary agency work in the 1990s until the 2000s, when it seems to stabilise. This is examined more closely in the subsequent section.

Figure 6.3: Temporary employment by gender (1984-2015)

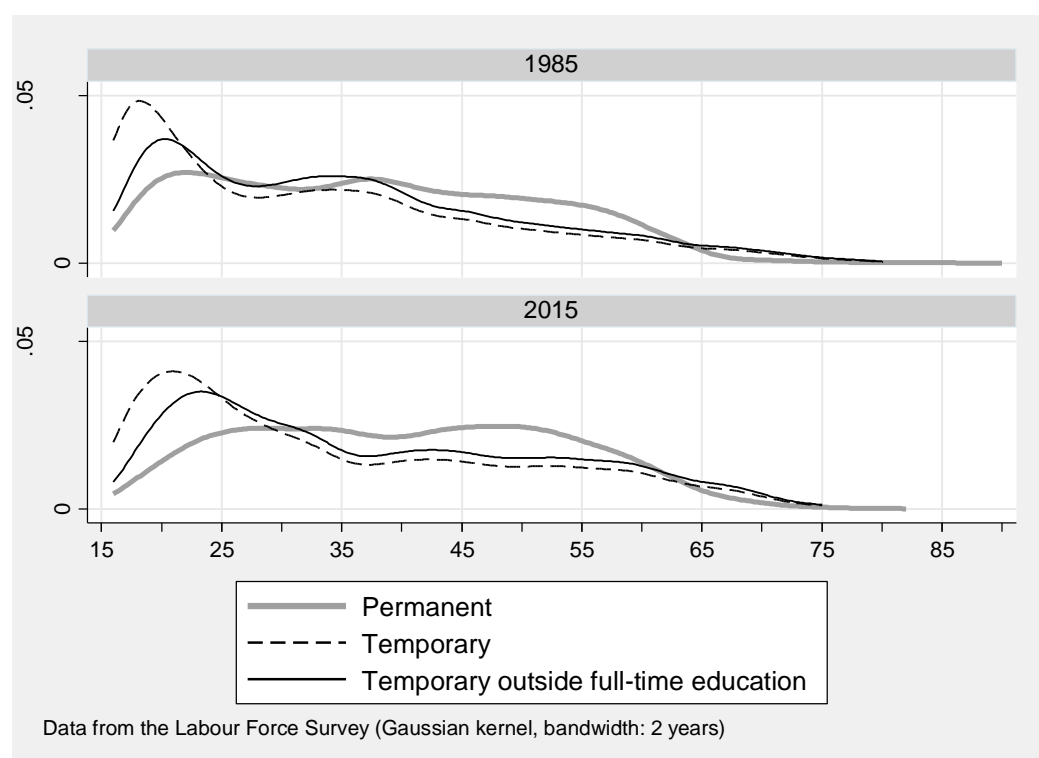


There is a wide gender disparity among temporary workers in the 1980s and 1990s. However, as figure 6.3 shows, this has been eroded over time. This is part of a long-term process of integration of women into the labour force on a more stable basis, discussed in the subsequent chapter and in chapter 8.

Figure 6.4 shows the age distribution of employment, temporary employment and temporary employment among those outside of full-time education for two years: 1985 and 2015. As is noted in the literature, temporary employment is skewed towards younger workers. There are also some interesting changes in the prevalence of temporary

work later in the life-course. In 2015, after the initial peak in temporary employment among the young, there is a long plateau from the mid-30s to about 60 years; by contrast, in 1985 there is a plateau from the mid-20s to the mid-30s and a tailing off over this age. However, this is largely a result of the change in the distribution of employment (note the grey line in figure 6.4), which results in larger numbers of middle aged workers generally. Indeed, the probability of a 45-55 year old being in temporary employment is unchanged, at around 3 percent, in both years.

Figure 6.4: Age distribution of temporary employment (1985, 2015)

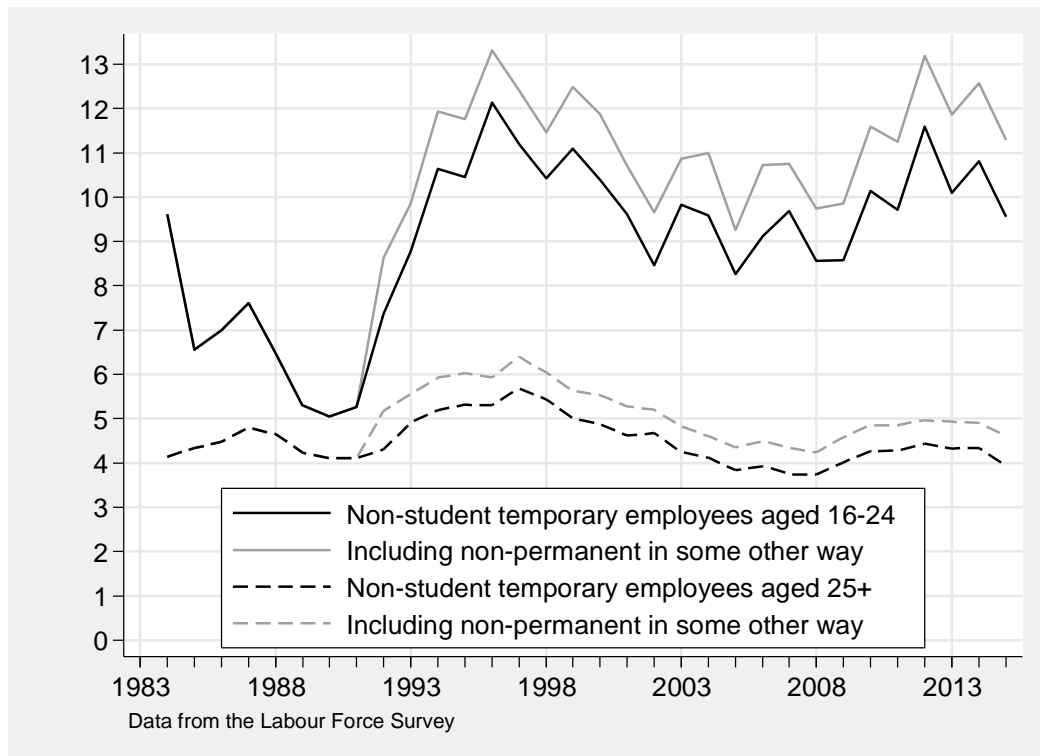


Temporary employment is the fate of many younger people entering the labour force. However, the extent to which there was a secular shift in the data is obscured by the potential discontinuity in the data from 1991 to 1992. Figure 6.5 shows the prevalence of temporary employment among 16-24 and 25+ age groups. In both cases, those in full-time education are excluded. Students make up a large proportion of younger temporary employees, and the student population in this age group has grown over the period considered. Increases in temporary employment in the wake of recessions are especially pronounced among younger people. The absence of permanent jobs during the initial stages of economic recovery would be expected to affect in particular those new to the labour market. As such, the patterns strongly echo those of the percentage of young people outside full-time education who are unemployed (figure 6.6). Youth unemployment featured heavily in the early 1980s and 1990s recessions, and to a lesser

extent after 2008-9, creating a pool of people available for temporary work in the aftermath of the recessions.

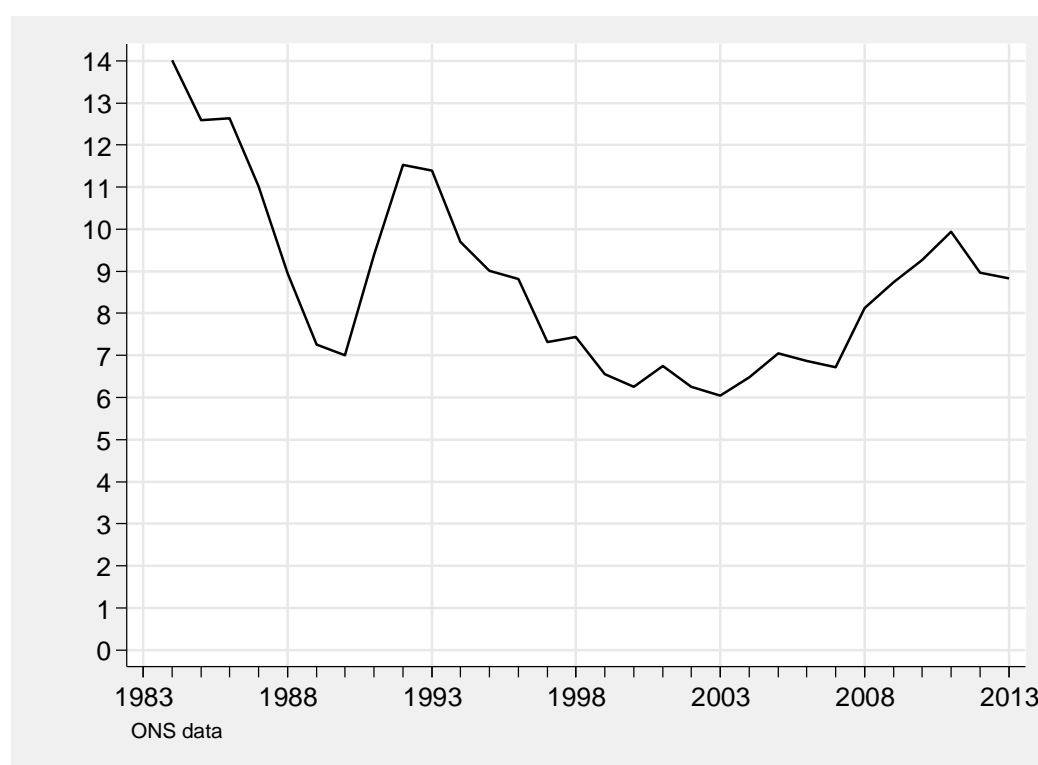
It is harder to tell whether there has been a secular shift in the level in temporary work among young people from the 1990s onwards. The graph shows figures excluding those who say they are “non-permanent in some other way” from 1992 onwards, which may help to correct the potential discontinuity in the data to some degree (the grey lines, by contrast, include these respondents in the figure). However, this is unlikely to fully account for the changes to the questions on temporary employment between 1991 and 1992. In addition, while full-time students are removed from the data shown in figure 6.5, it is likely that there is an increased number of part-time students in the age group shown. Finally, the figure is declining sharply in 1984-5, right at the beginning of the period covered, making a comparison between the 1980s and 1990s difficult. While the trough in the late 1980s seems particularly low, it is noteworthy that the percentage of young people in temporary employment in 1984 is close to the figure at a comparable point after the early 1990s and 2008-9 recessions. Furthermore, even if more young people are employed on a temporary basis from the 1990s onward, this has not fed through to older age groups at all (as the dotted lines in figure 6.5 reveal).

Figure 6.5: Temporary employment by age group (1984-2015)



Returning to the question of students in temporary employment, 40.5 percent of temporary workers aged 16-25 were full-time students in Q4 of 2015 (compared with 18.3 percent of permanent workers), a slight increase from 37.1 percent in 1985. As table 6.1 shows, student temporary workers were concentrated in “casual” work and, to a lesser extent, “seasonal work” (though note that this is the Q4 data; data covering the summer vacation is likely to show far higher levels of seasonal work among students). This concentration in casual work is markedly different to the situation for non-students, justifying the decision to treat student temporary work as different to non-student temporary work among young people. A situation in which roughly a third of those in college or university education now report that they are in some form of employment (again, from the 2015 Q4 data) creates a large pool of people able to undertake temporary work (see Doogan, 2009, pp.161-165, on the emergence of this labour market in students). However, this does not, in and of itself, suggest that these student-workers are fated to remain as temporary employees.

Figure 6.6: Youth unemployment (1984-2013)



Temporary jobs were in 2015 distributed between most sectors in roughly similar proportions to permanent jobs. However, they were underrepresented in manufacturing and in financial services, and strongly overrepresented in public services (table 6.2).

Table 6.3 presents a similar breakdown for 1985. Thirty years ago, the disproportionate concentration of temporary work within public administration, education and health was even higher.

Table 6.1: Forms of temporary work among students/non-students (2015)

| Main way job was temporary | Non-student | Full-time student |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------------|
| Temporary agency | 18.2% | 5.3% |
| Casual work | 16.5% | 52.2% |
| Seasonal work | 7.9% | 13.3% |
| Fixed task/term | 42.2% | 15.9% |
| Other | 15.2% | 13.4% |

(Data from LFS, 2015Q4)

Table 6.2: Sectoral distribution of permanent and temporary jobs (2015)

| Sector | Permanent | Temporary |
|---|------------------|------------------|
| Manufacturing | 11.3% | 7.8% |
| Distribution, hotels & restaurants | 19.8% | 20.3% |
| Banking, finance & insurance | 17.9% | 12.9% |
| Public administration, education & health | 32.1% | 39.9% |
| Other | 18.9% | 19.1% |

(Data from LFS, 2015Q4)

Table 6.3: Sectoral distribution of permanent and temporary jobs (1985)

| Sector | Permanent | Temporary |
|---|------------------|------------------|
| Manufacturing and extraction | 25.2% | 13.4% |
| Distribution, hotels, catering and repair | 19.6% | 24.9% |
| Banking, finance and business services | 9.4% | 7.3% |
| Public services | 26.9% | 40.0% |
| Other | 18.9% | 14.4% |

(Data from LFS, 1985)

The public sector is now responsible for roughly a third of employment in the UK, so the amount of temporary work in this area is important. It is possible to break the sector down in more detail using the 2015 Q4 data. Here we find that temporary work in the public sector is dominated by education. While just 4.6 percent of those in public

administration and 6.5 percent in healthcare were temporary, 11.0 percent in education regard themselves as non-permanent in some way. Of these temporary education workers, 60 percent cite as the main reason why they are temporary that they are contracted for a fixed task or fixed period. Some 9.3 percent of primary and secondary school staff are reported as temporary; for those in the tertiary sector the figure is 18.3 percent. Although direct comparisons are not possible due to changes in the way sectors are classified, the figures for schools 30 years earlier is similar—9.2 percent of school staff in 1985. However, a lower figure, 14.7 percent, in the universities said they were temporary that year. The 2015 figures reveal that the high levels of temporary employment in the tertiary sector are general to teaching and non-teaching staff alike—14.9 percent for “teaching and educational” professionals and 20.6 percent for other groupings. This peculiarity of tertiary education, in which disproportionately large numbers of staff, along with large number of students, are in temporary work, might have some bearing on the widespread discourse surrounding precarity within academia, a question returned to in section 8.11 below. The specificity of particular labour markets, which will feature throughout the discussion of de-standardisation, is developed theoretically in section 8.4.

On average, the mean elapsed tenure of temporary employment was by 2015 Q4 just under three years, the same as in the late 1980s. It is not possible to say, on the basis of the LFS data, whether people are trapped in a succession of temporary jobs, as there is no record of the permanence of the prior job in the data. However, it is possible to look at levels of dissatisfaction with existing jobs. Table 6.4 reports the numbers seeking an additional or a completely new job in selected years. There is little evidence that this has grown dramatically. Note also that the low point for those in temporary work seeking a different job (and additional jobs) was in 2005, after a long decline in levels of temporary work. This again suggests *involuntary* temporary working takes place in the wake of recessions, for the reasons suggested above.

Table 6.4: Employees seeking a new or additional job (1985, 1995, 2005, 2015)

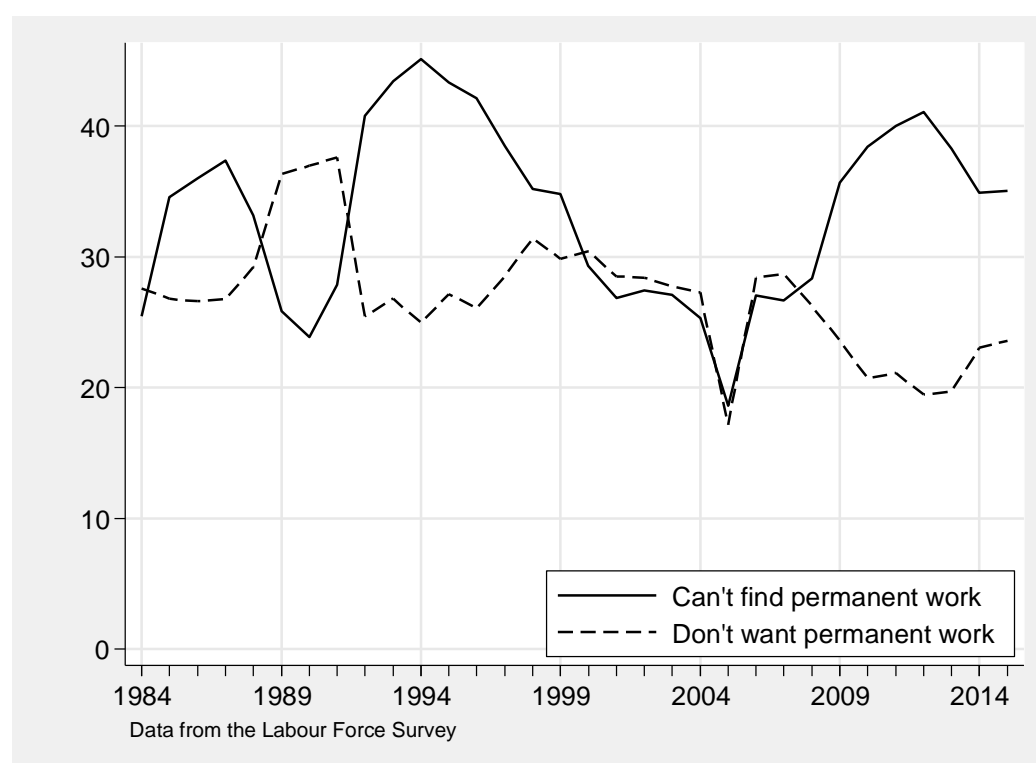
| | 1985 | | 1995(Q4) | | 2005(Q4) | | 2015(Q4) | |
|--------------------------------------|------|-------|----------|-------|----------|-------|----------|-------|
| | Perm | Temp | Perm | Temp | Perm | Temp | Perm | Temp |
| Looking for a new job | 5.0% | 18.4% | 5.3% | 17.9% | 4.5% | 15.2% | 5.3% | 17.4% |
| Looking for an additional job | 0.5% | 2.4% | 0.7% | 2.0% | 0.6% | 1.0% | 0.7% | 1.5% |

(Data from LFS)

This view is corroborated by figure 6.7, which shows clearly the cyclical and counter-cyclical patterns among those who “can’t find” or “don’t want” permanent work. Again, there are surges in those unable to find permanent work in the wake of recessions, with this figure declining during recoveries. Naturally, the percentage who do not want permanent work moves in the opposite direction.

Overall the analysis of temporary work suggests that this form of employment exhibits cyclical trends, especially for younger people entering the labour market, but, if there is a secular pattern, it is weak for the labour force as a whole, and is not unequivocally supported in the available data even for younger people. Certainly temporary work, if the data in the LFS can be relied upon, is not a source of rising precarity in the neoliberal period in the UK at an aggregate level. It remains stubbornly around 6 percent of employees; moreover those reporting that they were in temporary employment because they were unable to find permanent work represented, by 2015 Q4, just 2.2 percent of employees. It should be restated that this is based on a broad conception of temporary employment: not simply the numbers with fixed-term contracts but all those saying their employment was non-permanent in some manner.

Figure 6.7: Percentage who cannot find/do not want permanent work (1984-2015)

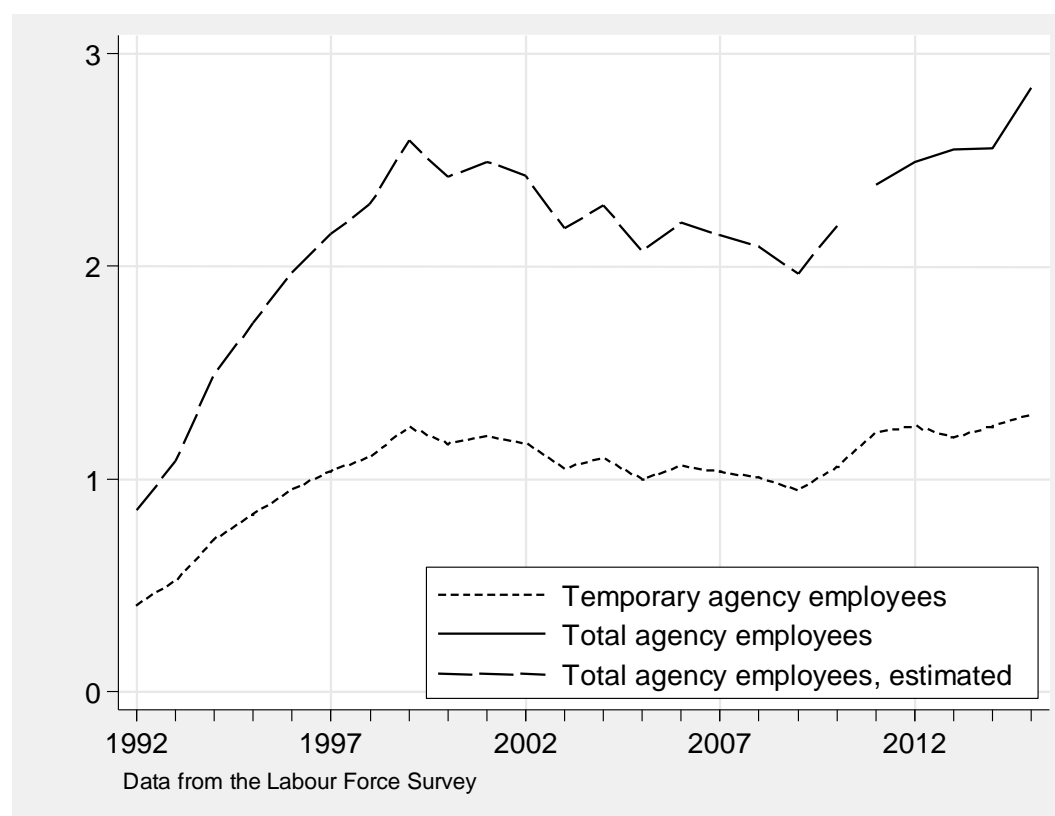


While temporary work is the most obvious candidate for a precarious category of employment, there are other, potentially hidden, types of precarity. The analysis now turns to these forms of non-standard employment.

6.3 Agency work

According to the data presented in the previous section, the level of temporary agency work stabilised at the end of the 1990s, with the exception of a modest rise in the wake of the recent recession, and stands at about 1 percent of total employment. However, the survey of the literature in chapter 3 suggests this may be misleading because many workers describe themselves *both* as agency workers and as permanent. Unfortunately, there is no way of measuring this category prior to 2011 when the relevant question was introduced into the LFS (specifically permanent employees were, from this date, asked: “Were you working as an agency worker, that is, employed through an employment agency?”). Following Judge and Tomlinson (2016) it is possible to extrapolate back based on a five-year average of the ratio between “temporary” and “permanent” agency working, although the results should be treated cautiously as there is no evidence that this ratio is stable prior to 2011.

Figure 6.8: Estimates of total agency working (1992-2015)



The results are in figure 6.8. This indicates a rise in agency work in the 1990s, followed by a steady decline in period in the lead up to the economic crisis of 2008, with a subsequent sharp rebound. Judge and Thompson also identify a group of self-employed workers who claim to be paid—and have their national insurance paid—by an employment agency. However, they are not included here both because they are a relatively small group (less than a quarter of a percent of the employed labour force) and because the nature of this group remains “obscure”, as Judge and Thompson put it.

The overall total, including “permanent” agency workers, remains less than 3 percent of employment. However, it is not clear that it is appropriate to simply add these two figures together. The most feasible interpretation of the responses to LFS questions that lead to people being designated as “permanent” agency workers is that they are placed in jobs on a permanent or ongoing basis. For instance, if “permanent” agency workers are asked if they are looking for a new job, their response is much closer to that of permanent workers than temporary workers. Just 7.4 percent said they were looking for a new job in 2015 (Q4) and 1.2 percent said they were looking for an additional one. These figures can be compared to those in table 6.4 above. The age distribution was also broadly similar to that of permanent workers, without the strong skewing towards younger workers characteristic of temporary work. The elapsed employment tenure for these “permanent” agency workers is lower than that of permanent workers, a mean of 54 months, as compared to 100 months; yet this remains above that of temporary workers, for whom the mean is 31 months.

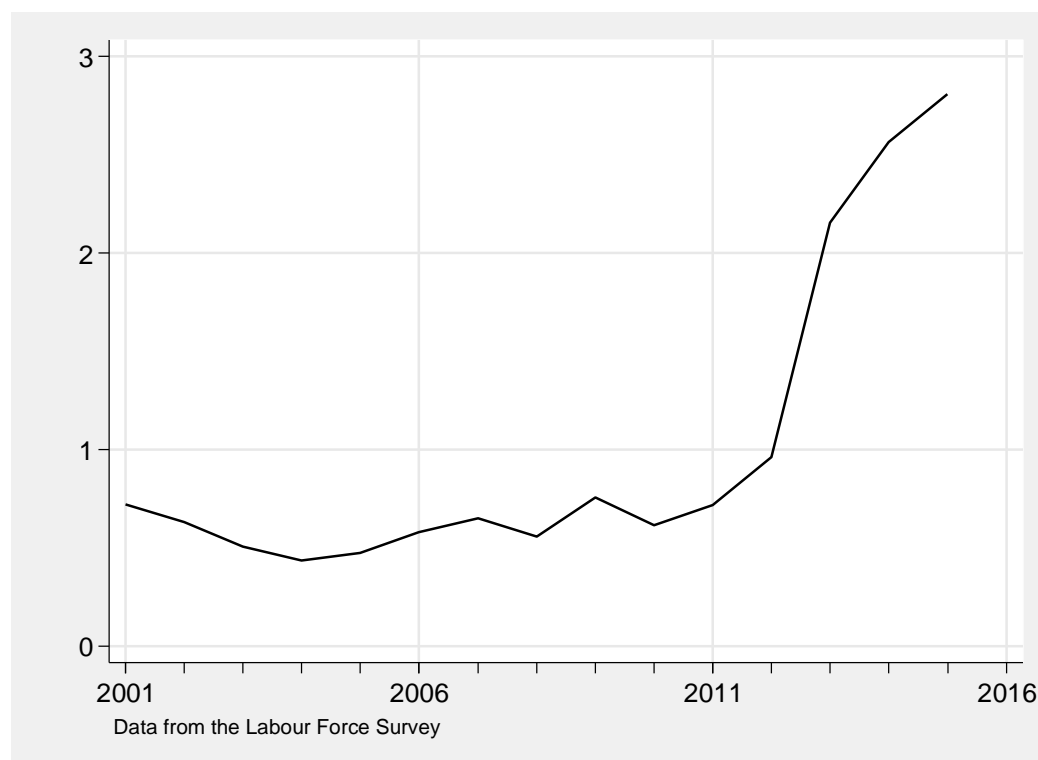
Unfortunately, without additional data it is hard to say more about agency work. There are two other potential sources of information that would add to this research. The first is the survey performed by the Recruitment and Employment Confederation. However, obtaining their data is prohibitively expensive and no methodological paper was available on request. The second is the “Survey of Recruitment Agencies” performed by the now defunct Department for Business Innovation and Skills in 2007. A response to an enquiry sent to its successor, the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, claimed that the data may have been misplaced! This strongly suggests that an additional survey of employment agencies is required to add to our knowledge of the industry and the nature of apparently “permanent” agency workers.

6.4 Zero-hours contracts

A second potentially hidden form of precarious employment is that involving zero-hours contracts (ZHCs). The use of ZHCs has become since 2013, when the issue was highlighted by politicians and in the media, a major topic of discussion in the UK. As discussed in chapter 3, while the extent to which these contracts are used can be estimated, both

through surveys of employers and of employees, there is a high degree of uncertainty in the resulting estimates and a lack of historical data that could be used to track the increase in ZHCs.

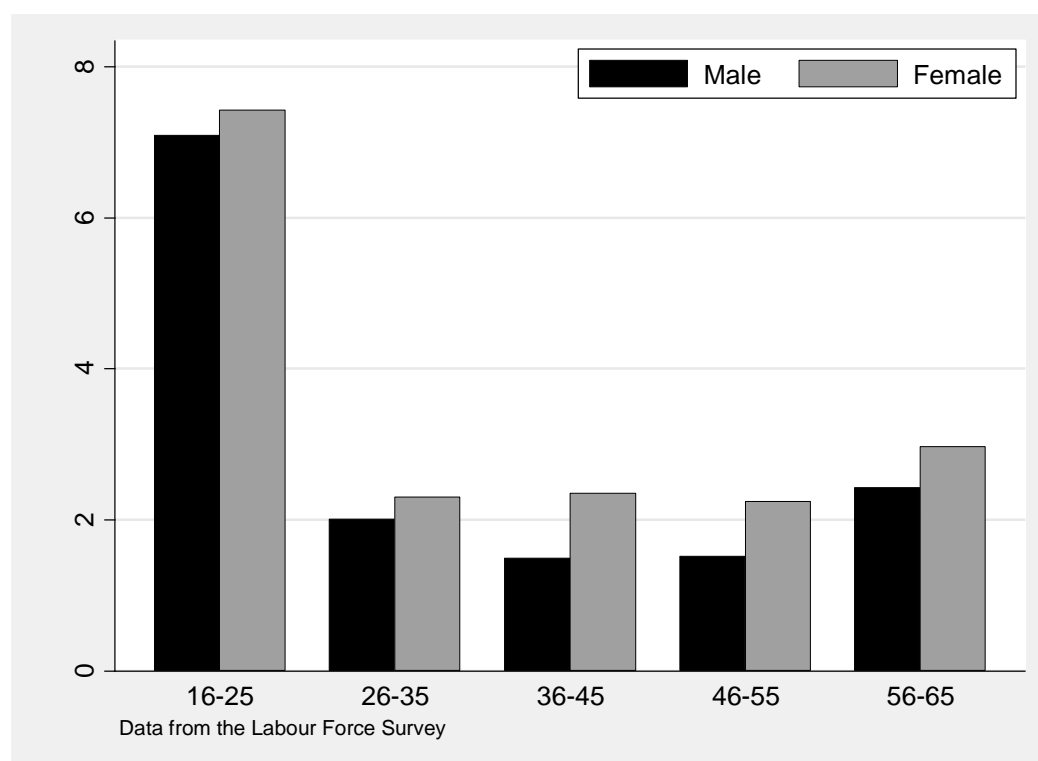
Figure 6.9: Percentage of employees with ZHC as their main contract (2001-15, Q4)



There are also a number of methodological issues in handling the data in the LFS, outlined in Chandler and Barrett (2013). First, because respondents are not asked in each quarter if they are on a ZHC in their main job, those who fail to respond to the survey in Q4 cannot have their answer rolled forwards from the previous quarter (as would be done for questions asked in all quarters). So it is necessary to uprate the figures by a factor that takes into account the effect of this non-response (specifically they are uprated by the ratio between the total base population being used, in this case the employed workforce, and the total base who did not have their answers rolled forward from the previous quarter, with appropriate weights used in both cases). Second, the LFS shifts from seasonal to calendar quarters in 2006. This means that data prior to 2006 needs to be uprated by 4/9 to account for the fact that the calendar quarter data reconstructed from the seasonal data will include people who were not asked if they were on ZHCs. Third, from spring 2004 until October-December 2013, there was a “check” erroneously included in the questionnaire preventing those who declared they were engaged in shift

work from saying they had a ZHC, affecting first wave interviewees in the October-December data. There is no straightforward way of correcting for this, so it should simply be noted that there may be a resulting underestimate of those working with ZHCs prior to 2013. The results are shown in figure 6.9. Note that the self-employed are excluded from these estimates, though a small number of people report being on a ZHC in their main job despite claiming self-employment.

Figure 6.10: ZHCs by age and gender (2015, Q4)



The rise in ZHCs is, as anticipated, very pronounced in 2012-13; there are signs of the increase levelling out after that surge, an impression reinforced by subsequent data, which shows, for instance, a negligible increase in use of ZHCs from Q2 to Q4 of 2016 (Chandler, 2017). How much of the 2012-2013 rise is a product of greater awareness of ZHCs? From 1 January 2012 until 1 October 2012 just 25 stories containing the term “zero-hours contract” are listed by Google News. For the same period in 2013, in the run-up to the surge in those reporting ZHCs, the number of stories had increased 20-fold to 509. It is likely that this high profile of ZHCs in the media explains at least some of the increase. In addition, by the fourth quarter of 2013 the estimate for the total numbers employed on ZHCs who had been with their current employer for a year or more was 334,000. However, the *total* number claiming to have a ZHC in their main job in the fourth

quarter of 2012 (ie one year earlier) was just 244,000. Unless huge numbers of existing employees had been moved onto a ZHC it is unlikely that the figures shown in figure 6.9 accurately reflect the growth in ZHCs; growing recognition of ZHCs is likely to be a more important factor in the surge between 2012 and 2013. If there is a rise in the 2000s, it is likely to have taken place more gradually than indicated.

Given the considerable problems with estimating the historical trends, the rest of this section focuses on the 2015 data. Figure 6.10 shows the concentration of ZHCs by age and gender, revealing a somewhat increased likelihood of women being on ZHCs in each category and, as with temporary contracts, a heavy concentration of ZHCs among the 16-25 age group.

Not only are ZHCs concentrated among those beginning their working life but they also exhibit a strong concentration by industry. Tables 6.5 and 6.6, respectively, show the areas with the largest use numerically and those with the highest percentage usage (among those with an estimated total of more than 10,000 employees on ZHCs), broken down by 4-digit industry class. Numerically, a small number of activities dominate the ZHC figures. These include, in particular, work in cafes, restaurants, bars and hotels. Hospital work is also a major contributor, but this is not because of a particular propensity for hospitals to use ZHCs, as the percentage on ZHCs in hospitals is little higher than for the labour force as a whole; rather, it is a consequence of the sheer scale of employment in this area.

Table 6.5: Sectors with the highest numbers of employees on ZHCs (2015, Q4)

| Sector | Estimated ZHCs | Estimated % employees on ZHC |
|---|-----------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Restaurants and mobile food services | 94,800 | 12.9% |
| Beverage serving activities | 46,700 | 17.9% |
| Hospital activities | 41,300 | 3.1% |
| Hotels and similar accommodation | 30,500 | 12.3% |
| Residential care for elderly and disabled | 26,000 | 9.2% |
| Operation of sports facilities | 22,700 | 14.7% |
| Residential nursing care | 20,600 | 6.3% |
| Other social work without accommodation | 18,800 | 3.2% |
| Social work without accom. for elderly and disabled | 18,000 | 29.8% |
| Child day-care activities | 17,400 | 9.1% |

(Data from LFS)

By percentage concentration, two additional areas stand out. One is temporary employment agencies. This may be a consequence of agencies using the so-called “Swedish derogation” loophole to avoid agency workers becoming entitled to the same pay and conditions as non-agency workers after 12 weeks in employment (under the 2011 regulations governing agency work). This can be avoided if the agency itself employs the workers and guarantees to pay them for four weeks between jobs. Employing agency workers on a ZHC can therefore be a way of minimising the burden for both the agency and the company hiring agency workers. The second is in social care activities, where social work without accommodation for the elderly and disabled has the highest proportion of employees with ZHCs.

Table 6.6: Sectors with the highest proportion of employees on ZHCs (2015, Q4)

| Sector (sectors with >10,000 ZHCs only) | Estimated ZHCs | Estimated % employees on ZHC |
|---|---------------------------|---|
| Social work without accom. for elderly and disabled | 18,000 | 29.8% |
| Temporary employment agency activities | 16,100 | 22.4% |
| Beverage serving activities | 46,700 | 17.9% |
| Activities of sports clubs | 12,000 | 15.1% |
| Operation of sports facilities | 22,700 | 14.7% |
| Restaurants and mobile food services | 94,800 | 12.9% |
| Hotels and similar accommodation | 30,500 | 12.3% |
| Event catering activities | 14,800 | 12.1% |
| Private security activities | 13,100 | 10.3% |
| Residential care for elderly and disabled | 26,000 | 9.2% |

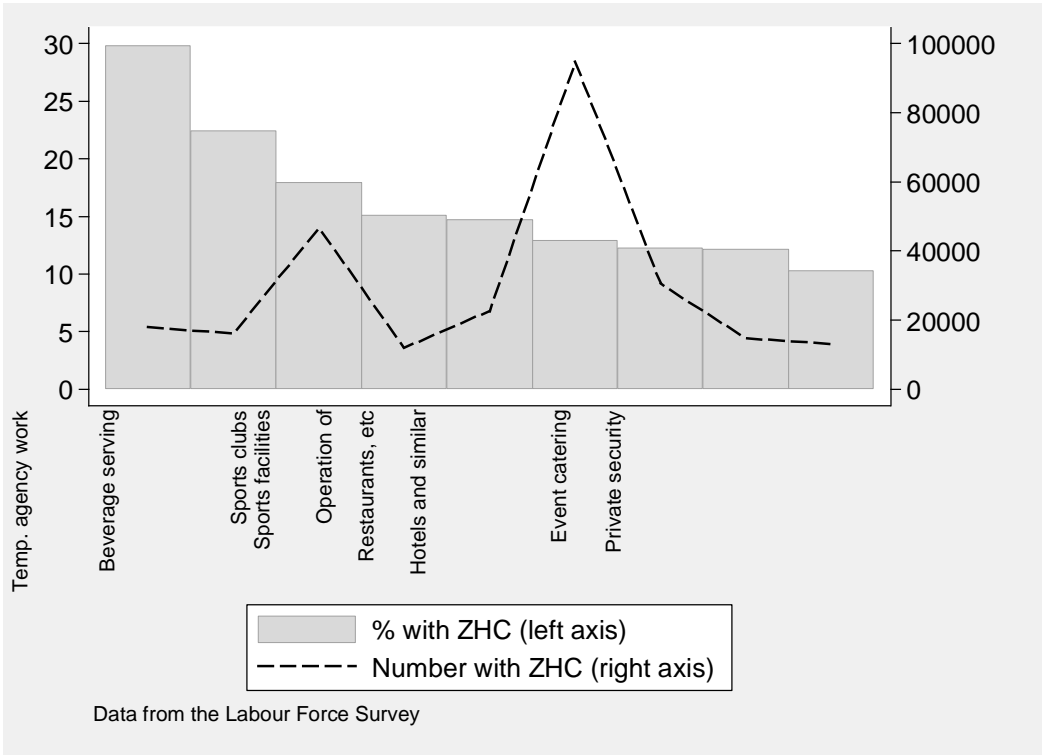
(Data from LFS)

The two forms of concentration are depicted visually in figure 6.11, which includes only sectors in which there are an estimated number of ZHCs greater than 10,000 and a concentration of more than 10 percent of employees in the sector.

The reasons for the concentration of ZHCs are examined in more detail from a theoretical perspective in chapter 8. However, it is worth considering here the scope of this concentration. Work in recreation and hospitality activities—restaurants, sports clubs, hotels and so on—has long involved a range of roles that are low-skilled and casualised. These areas also employ large numbers who combine work with study, as shown in table 6.7. It is not unreasonable to imagine that ZHCs are simply giving a vestige of formality to employment relations that preciously existed in such areas. For instance, in 1995 Q4, before the LFS started measuring the use of ZHCs, 26 percent of students involved in “bar work” reported that their work was temporary, with 82 percent of those saying that it

was temporary in the sense of being “casual work”. By 2015 Q4, 13 percent of students involved in “beverage serving” activities said they were temporary, 85 percent of whom offered as the main sense in which their job was temporary that it was casual. Some 60 percent of these casualised student beverage servers report being on a ZHC. It is possible that the consolidation of the food and beverage serving industries makes it more likely that students will receive some formal contract, rather than being employed “cash in hand” on an informal basis by a small pub or café.

Figure 6.11: Concentration of ZHCs (2015, Q4)



The other area of exceptional concentration of ZHCs—social work without accommodation—differs in that it is not a source of employment for large numbers of full-time students. Adult social care services in the UK have undergone a dramatic transformation. In 1993 less than 10 percent of hours of home care were outsourced to private or charitable providers. By 2012 this had risen to 89 percent (Humphries, 2013). According to the 2015 Q4 LFS, three quarters of those employed in social work without accommodation were now in the private sector. Not only is the provision of social care increasingly dominated by private firms, but also the pressure on social care has intensified due to demographic pressures and, particularly since the recession of 2008-9, curbs to funding (Morse, 2014). Faced with these funding cuts, local authorities managed

to reduce social care budgets by 20 percent, largely through placing greater pressure on the array of small and large private providers commissioned to provide care. The downward pressure on unit costs and a tendency for commissioners to prioritise cost-cutting measures over the quality of provision has resulted in poor and declining employment standards. This, in general, involves both low pay, including “extensive” non-compliance with national minimum wage legislation, and “insecurity of working hours”. Furthermore, “use of zero-hour contracts by care providers is associated with multiple unpaid gaps in a working day” (Grimshaw et al, 2015, p.506). In other words, there exist here the perfect conditions for the extensive use of ZHCs: pressure to cut costs, with multiple providers competing for contracts, in a situation in which there is often extensive time spent between jobs, for instance while travelling between the houses of those cared for. A study by Grimshaw and others (2015) reports that of the providers surveyed, only a tenth paid for breaks between appointments with social care users and seven in ten only offered ZHCs to workers.

Table 6.7: Students and ZHCs in selected areas (2015, Q4)

| Sector | Percentage of full-time students among those employed on ZHCs |
|---|--|
| Restaurants, etc | 46.4% |
| Beverage serving | 43.2% |
| Hotels, etc | 30.1% |
| Social work without acc. for elderly and disabled | 6.5% |

(Data from LFS)

To anticipate a point made in chapter 8, the specificity of this particular labour market must be understood. Furthermore, conditions in adult social care have resulted in extraordinarily high levels of staff turnover in the sector. In 2015 (Q4) only 58 percent of employees in social work without accommodation had been in their job over two years, compared to 70 percent of employees in general. While 6 percent of employees generally report that they are looking for a new job, the figure for social work without accommodation is more than twice as high at 13 percent, rising to 31 percent among those on ZHCs. The result has been increased difficulty in “hiring, retention and training of staff” among adult social care providers (Shearing, 2015). Across adult social care as a whole, staff turnover is reported at 25 percent per annum (SFC, 2015), levels that would be considered unacceptable in most industries. There are also low levels of union organisation across this sector and a relatively limited capacity of workers, who often

operate in isolated conditions, to resist the demands of management (Grimshaw et al, 2015).

There is no question that jobs featuring ZHCs more generally are jobs that disproportionate numbers would like to leave. Some 16.1 percent on a ZHC in their main job report that they are looking for a new job. For particular groups, though, there is less desire to move out of ZHC jobs. Among full-time students, just 6.3 percent with a ZHC say they would like a different job, compared to 4.9 percent without. This again suggests that the use of ZHCs among full-time students should be regarded differently from the use of ZHCs more generally. Among those aged 60 or more, although the numbers reporting ZHCs in the LFS are too low to make any definitive statement, very few (2 out of 81 respondents in this category) with a ZHC said in 2015 they would like a new job. This suggests that for those moving towards retirement ZHCs may offer a way to maintain a level of employment needed or desired by older workers. Unsurprisingly, ZHCs do lead to underemployment. Whereas 8.2 percent of employees without ZHCs report that they would like more hours at their existing rate of pay, this rises to 21.5 percent among those with ZHCs. However, again those over 60 do not tend to report that they would like more hours.

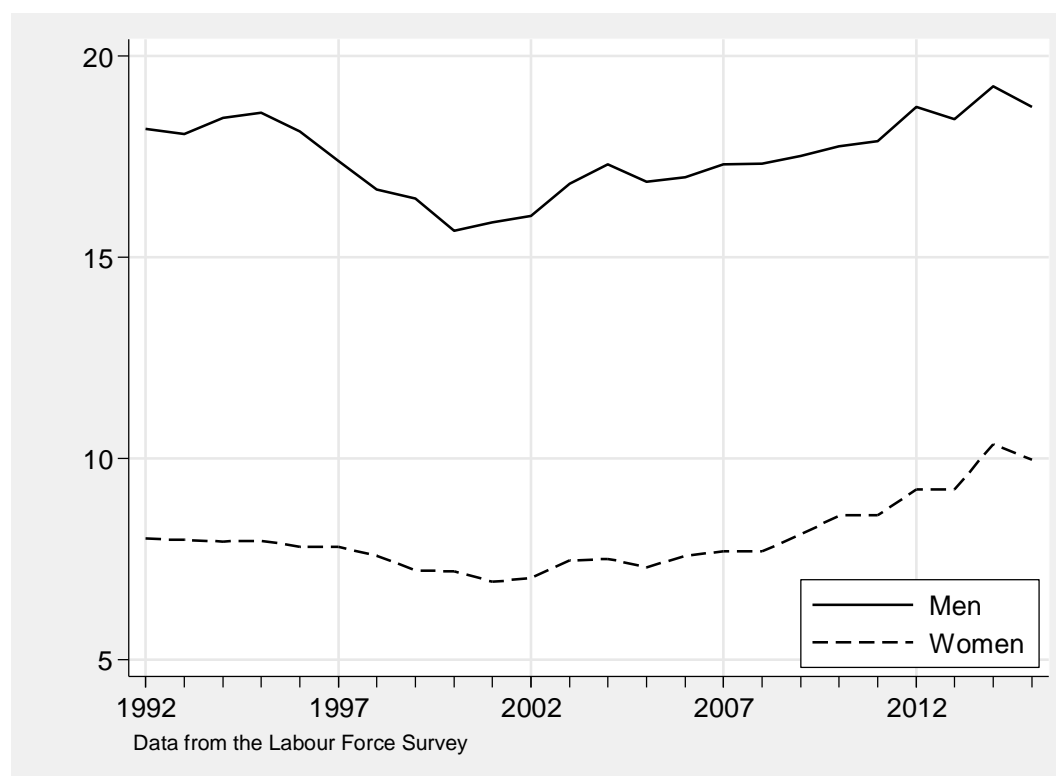
In summary, two distinct areas of concentration of ZHCs emerge from this analysis. One is among traditionally casualised groups in the low-skilled hospitality sector, including large numbers of full-time students. The other is the utilisation of ZHC to cut costs in a specific, also low skilled, industry with particular features that make ZHCs attractive to employers. Overall, around 3 percent of those in employment are on ZHCs, though this overlaps with other forms of atypical employment, such as temporary contracts and agency work.

At this stage it is possible to consider the total extent of all three non-standard forms of employment. In total an estimated 9.5 percent of the employed labour force regarded their work as temporary in some way, claimed they were a “permanent” agency worker or were on a ZHC in Q4 of 2015. This leaves over 90 percent of the employed labour force in permanent, direct employment. Compare this to the situation in 1985, some three decades earlier, when the *upper limit* for permanent employment was 94 percent, and this is based on a more restrictive conception of temporary work, with *no* “permanent” agency workers and *no* ZHCs category. An increase of, *at most*, 4 percent of the labour force over three decades is hardly confirmation of the proposition of growing precarity in the UK. Indeed, because of the inconsistencies in the data there are no strong grounds for assuming that there is any aggregate increase at all in non-standard forms of employment leading to precarity over the neoliberal period.

6.5 Self-employment and the gig economy

A final potentially hidden form of precarity is among those reporting they are self-employed. Here the emphasis will be on the period after 2001, when self-employment rose from 12 to 15 percent of the labour force and prior to which self-employment was in decline for both men and women (figure 6.12). The rise in self-employment coincides with modest changes in the composition of self-employment (table 6.8), with a decline in the share of self-employment located in distribution, hotels and restaurants, and an increase in banking and finance. There were small increases in the public sector and in the “other services” category. The share of self-employment without employees also grew, at least up to 2011 when it began to level out (figure 6.13).

Figure 6.12: Self-employment as a percentage of the labour force (1992-2015, Q2)



The concern here is whether the apparent growth of self-employment reflects a growth of precarious employment. As suggested in chapter 3, this might take the form of an emergent “gig economy” or it might take the form of more traditional forms of false self-employment, for instance in the construction industry. Unfortunately, the data available from the LFS offers only limited insights into this, tending to accept the self-employed status of respondents at face value. For instance, those reporting that they are self-employed are not asked whether they are training in their work, which might potentially be the case for those in false self-employment.

One piece of evidence for the growth of a gig economy would be a rise in those who define themselves as freelancers or contractors. Figure 6.14 shows these categories as a percentage of the total labour force (employed and self-employed). No secular trend is visible during the period of growth of self-employment. The figures do rise around the time of the 2008-9 recession and the financial crisis that began in 2007, perhaps due to employers' caution about taking on new staff under these conditions.

Table 6.8: The changing distribution of self-employment (2000, 2015, Q2)

| | 2000 | | 2015 | |
|---|------------|-----------|------------|-----------|
| | Employment | Self-emp. | Employment | Self-emp. |
| Agriculture, forestry and fishing | 0.9% | 5.1% | 0.8% | 5.4% |
| Energy and water | 1.2% | 0.3% | 1.5% | 0.6% |
| Manufacturing | 18.2% | 7.5% | 11.3% | 6.3% |
| Construction | 5.3% | 19.8% | 4.8% | 18.1% |
| Distribution, hotels and restaurants | 19.8% | 18.3% | 19.7% | 12.3% |
| Transport and communication | 6.9% | 6.6% | 6.2% | 6.6% |
| Banking and finance | 15.2% | 19.2% | 17.4% | 25.1% |
| Public admin, education and health | 27.1% | 10.3% | 32.8% | 12.0% |
| Other services | 5.3% | 12.9% | 5.5% | 13.5% |

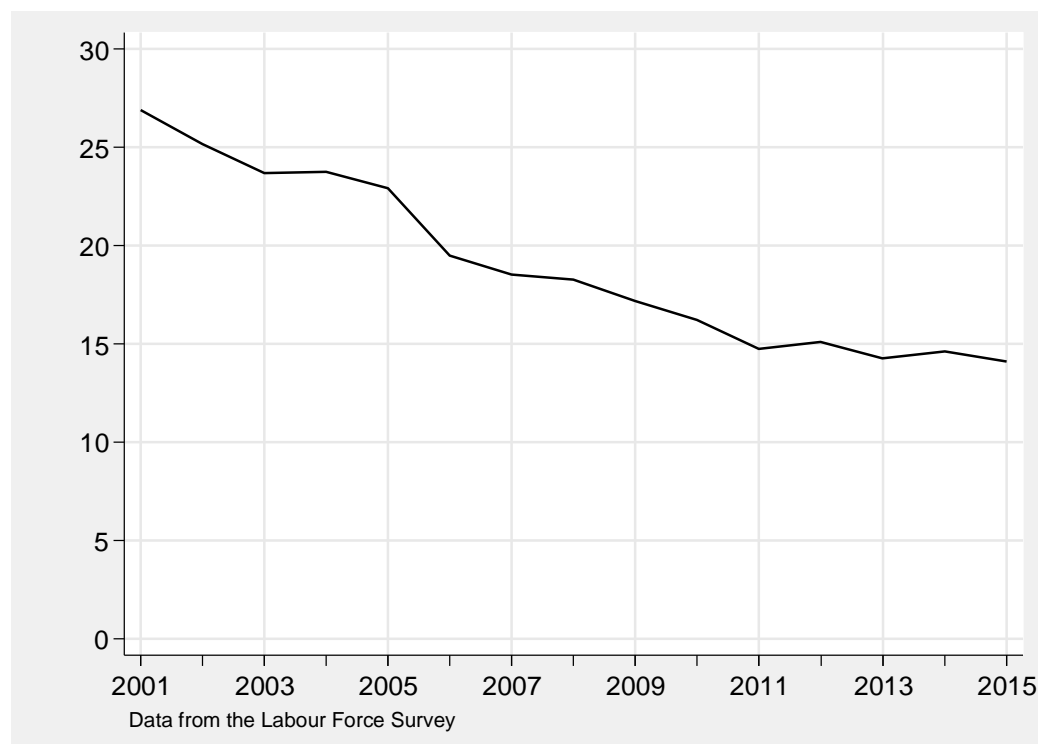
(Data from LFS)

There have been changes to the distribution of contractors or freelancers across industries. In 2001 Q4 59.5 percent of those defining themselves as contractors were concentrated in construction. By 2015 Q4 this had fallen to 50.8 percent. Noteworthy increases came in public administration, education and healthcare (from 2.6 to 6.1 percent) and banking and finance (from 8.6 percent to 13.8 percent), which also includes a range of other business services. These sectors therefore deserve closer examination to see if this reflects an emerging precarious workforce.

Unfortunately, there are only 32 contractors in banking and finance in the 2015 Q4 LFS, and 19 in the public services, which makes a detailed breakdown of these two groups difficult. Nonetheless, when these two groups of contractors are pooled together an estimated 39.6 percent are in the "professional" group, with 20.1 in the "associate professional and technical" group. Typical jobs occupied by these contractors include "activities of insurance agents and brokers", "engineering activities and related technical consultancy", "organisation of conventions and trade shows" and "dental practice

activities”. These do not seem like areas of work typically associated with the gig economy.

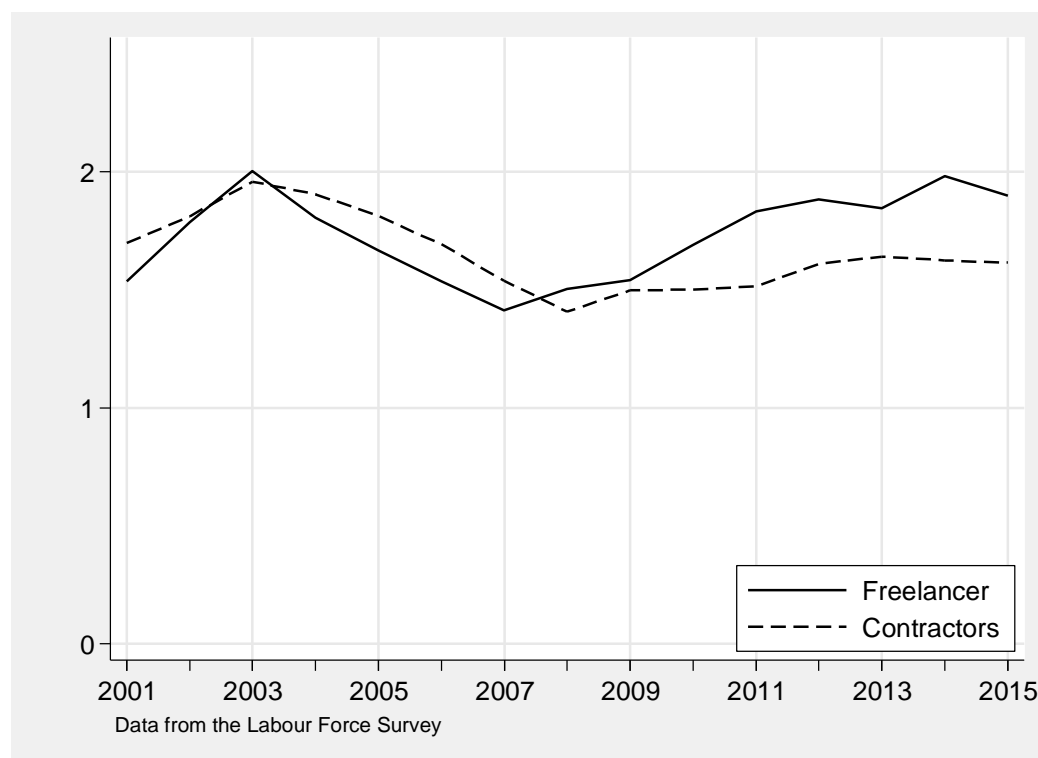
Figure 6.13: Self-employment with employees (2001-15, Q2)



Turning to freelancers, the percentage of freelancers in “other services” fell from 37.7 percent to 22.9 percent from 2001 to 2015. Modest rises took place in construction (3.5 percent to 6.6 percent), “transport and communication” (3.8 percent to 6.3 percent) and, more dramatically, “banking and finance” (23.6 percent to 34.2 percent). It is unclear how significant the increase in construction is, given the historically high levels of contract work and false self-employment in this industry. It may simply be a case of people who previously saw themselves as contractors describing themselves as freelancers. Transport and communication is potentially more interesting, as this is a field which has been a particular focus in discussions of the gig economy, with companies such as Uber controversially treating their taxi drivers as self-employed. There are only 44 freelancers from this sector in the 2015 Q4 survey, again making it difficult to offer any detailed breakdown. These 44 are in fact overwhelmingly in communication rather transportation, with three quarters of them engaged in either “publishing of books, periodicals and other publishing activities”, “motion picture, video and television programme activities” or “computer programming, consultancy and related activities”. The growth of firms such as Uber leaves little trace in this data. Again, in “banking and finance” a number of areas of

work dominated by professional or associate professional occupations stand out: “management consultancy activities”, “specialised design activities” and “photographic activities” being the most prominent.

Figure 6.14: Self-employed freelancers and contractors (2001-15)



Some 7.6 percent of subcontracts and 8.8 percent of freelancers claimed they were looking for a different or additional job in 2015 Q4, compared with 6.5 percent across the labour force and just 5.7 percent of those who were self-employed. The implication is that freelancing and contracting jobs are a little less satisfactory than self-employed positions more generally. However, while only 13.3 percent of contractors seeking alternative work express a preference for self-employment in their future work, 19.4 percent of freelancers do (higher than the 17.8 percent figure for all self-employed people). This reflects the positive reasons identified by freelancers for entering self-employment. For freelancers the most likely reason cited for being self-employed was the nature of the job itself (23.1 percent, compared to 16.9 percent for all self-employed people). When contractors are asked why they are in self-employment, in contrast with freelancers and self-employed people more generally, they were more likely to say that they are self-employed because they could not find other employment (17.2 percent, compared to 4.4 percent for all self-

employed people) or to maintain or increase their income (28.1 percent compared to 18.5 percent for all self-employed people).

One potential sign of false self-employment is a self-employed individual providing services for a single “customer”. As table 6.9 shows, this is particularly common for contractors and, to a lesser extent, for freelancers. However, the figures for contracts with a single customer are dominated by construction work, which accounts for half of this group.

The evolution of self-employment with a single customer is shown in figure 6.15, from 2006 to 2015, the period for which data is available. The very recent rise, from 10.4 percent in 2011 to 13.4 in 2015 is of interest. This is broken down by industry in table 6.10, which shows industries (defined according to their two-digit code) in which the numbers in this situation have changed by an estimated total of more than 2,500 and the percentage of the labour force in this situation has changed by more than 2 percent.

Table 6.9: Number of customers for categories of self-employment (2015, Q2)

| Self-employed status | Number of clients or customers | | | |
|--|---------------------------------------|--------------|---------------|-------------|
| | Does not apply | One | More than one | Don't know |
| Paid by employment agency | 87.0% | 6.2% | 6.3% | 0.5% |
| Sole director of Ltd business | 15.6% | 16.0% | 66.2% | 2.3% |
| Running business or professional practice | 11.3% | 5.7% | 81.9% | 1.1% |
| Partner in business or professional practice | 14.2% | 4.3% | 79.4% | 2.1% |
| Working for self | 15.3% | 12.5% | 69.9% | 2.3% |
| Contractor | 23.1% | 32.4% | 40.1% | 3.6% |
| Freelance | 14.1% | 22.0% | 63.0% | 0.8% |
| None of above | 70.2% | 10.1% | 17.5% | 2.2% |
| Total | 23.2% | 12.0% | 62.8% | 2.0% |

(Data from LFS)

Again, construction plays an enormous role, along with a range of activities not typically identified with the gig economy, such as management consultancy, engineering consultants or tax consultants. One possible exception is those in “real estate activities”, who, on closer inspection, turn out to be concentrated among those engaged in “renting” activities. However, this is unlikely to represent people using online platforms such as

Airbnb, which can be considered part of the “gig economy”, as common sense suggests these people would be unlikely to report having a single customer.

Figure 6.15: Percentage of the self-employed with a single customer (2006-15, Q2)

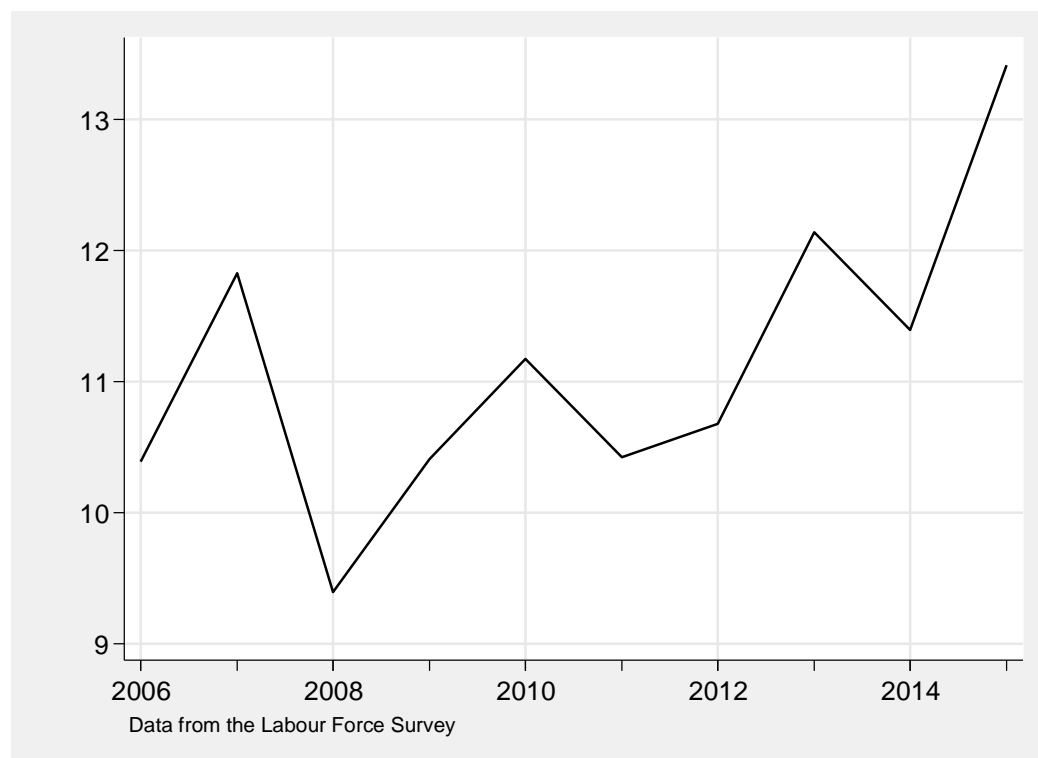


Table 6.10: Changes to self-employment with a single customer (2011-15, Q2)

| Industry | Increase in those self-employed with a single customer, 2011-15 | |
|--|---|---|
| | Change in estimated number | Change in % of labour force in the industry |
| Specialised construction activities | 28,604 | 2.7% |
| Real estate activities | 8,179 | 2.3% |
| Legal and accounting activities | 10,206 | 2.0% |
| Activities of head offices and management consultancy activities | 10,996 | 2.0% |
| Architectural and engineering activities; technical testing and analysis | 12,096 | 2.1% |
| Advertising and market research | 12,062 | 2.1% |

(Data from LFS)

Overall it is hard to detect in the data much evidence of a gig economy emerging on a large scale. The LFS simply does not ask the questions needed to isolate those workers who use online platforms to obtain work, whether through “crowdworking” or “work on demand via app” (De Stefano, 2016). It has already been noted, in section 3.5.5, that attempts to assess the extent of these novel forms of employment have reached figures of about 1 percent of those of working age who use gig work of this kind as their main source of income (CIPD, 2017; Huws et al, 2017). These attempts have been based on samples used by market research firms due to a lack of the resources necessary to undertake a large-scale face-to-face survey.

However, the limitations in the data itself are clearly an issue and one that should be taken up by the LFS. Given widespread discourse about the problematic nature of self-employment in contemporary capitalism, discussed in chapter 3, it is unfortunate that the LFS, the main source of official information about the UK labour force, is not an adequate tool for assessing these claims. It tends to treat self-employment as unproblematic and distinct from employment. Future iterations of the LFS could address this by including questions about the nature of the workplace and their relationship with their “client” or “customer” for those who declare themselves to be self-employed.

Some helpful changes have taken place. In the 2014 Q4 LFS a new question was introduced asking the self-employed why they had that status. This should allow researchers to track the proportion of those who are self-employed because they cannot find employment. As noted above, in the 2015 Q4 data this represents a minority of those in self-employment. It is true that those who are relatively new to self-employment are more likely to say that they that they are self-employed because they could not find employment. This is in line with the findings of an independent survey by the Resolution Foundation (D’Arcy and Gardiner, 2014). However, it is possible that this has always been the case, and that those who would prefer to be in employment do move out of self-employment. While future research will be able to identify if there is growth in “reluctant self-employees”, for now this is not possible.

6.6 Summary

The evidence set out in this chapter does not support the subsidiary proposition being tested here, namely that the neoliberal period has seen growing use of non-standard forms of work rendering employment more contingent. That said, as table 6.11 shows, there are considerable limitations to the data available. Given these limitations, it is not ruled out that some forms of non-standard employment have grown or that new forms have emerged during the neoliberal period. However, these seem to be confined to particular areas of employment. There is little evidence that they are becoming the norm.

Temporary work has not expanded but the evidence regarding the growth of “hidden” forms of precarity is harder to read. There may be a recent increase in agency work among workers who regard themselves as “permanent”, but from quite low levels. Furthermore it is not clear that these permanent agency workers are especially precarious and in some ways they seem more similar to non-agency workers than temporary agency workers. The use of temporary agency workers grew in the early to mid-1990s but then stabilised at a little over 1 percent of the labour force and has not grown since. Use of ZHCs has almost certainly grown, but distinguishing the real growth from growing awareness of ZHCs is difficult using the survey data. ZHCs do not, anyway, penetrate uniformly across the economy, but are concentrated in traditionally casualised areas and areas such as adult social care where they offer particular advantages to employers. There is also some evidence that their use is levelling out.

Table 6.11: Summary of trends in non-standard work

| Type of change | |
|-------------------|---|
| Stable | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Temporary work, broadly defined, fairly stable across the period. • Seasonal work, casualised work and “other” temporary work stable or declining slightly from 1992. • Freelancing and contracting broadly stable from 2001. |
| Long-term shifts | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gradual convergence in extent of temporary work between genders. • Temporary work probably more concentrated among 16-24 year olds from the 1990s, but no evidence of this feeding through into greater temporary work later in life. • Rise in temporary agency work from 1992-7, which stabilises at just over 1 percent of employment for most of the period thereafter. • Rise in self-employment after 2001, along with a shift towards self-employment without employees. |
| Cyclical patterns | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Temporary work with fixed-term contracts rises after recessions and falls in recoveries. This is especially sharp among young people. • Expansion of involuntary temporary work after recessions. |
| Unknown | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Possible long-term rise in “permanent” agency workers. However, data does not extend back before 2011 and it is not clear who this group are. • Probable rise in ZHCs in the 2000s, highly concentrated in particular sectors. But it is unclear how much of this is a secular trend due to lack of data. The surge in 2012-2013 is suspect. • The extent to which the rise in self-employment is a rise in precarious employment is unclear due to limited data. • Possible rise in self-employment with a single customer after recessions, but insufficient data prior to 2006. |

Even if all these forms of non-standard employment are taken together, at *most* they have expanded by 4 percent of the labour force since the 1980s, and that probably overstates their growth, which may be negligible or even negative. Among those in employment, more than 90 percent are in permanent, directly-employed forms of work.

The argument that false forms of self-employment have placed some workers in a precarious position is more compelling. There has been a rise in self-employment since 2001, though it should also be noted that self-employment was declining in the late 1990s and that the growth since 2001 only amounts to 3 percent of the labour force. Self-employment cannot therefore offer an explanation for rising precarity *throughout* the neoliberal period. Moreover, self-employment is the area in which the LFS data is most problematic and it remains unclear how much of the increase since 2001 involves precarious forms of work. Certainly there has been no growth among those defining themselves as freelancers or contractors. Insomuch as there has been a rise in self-employed people with a single customer or client, which may be the case in the period from 2011, the data remains dominated by the construction industry. Other areas of work where this status has grown are not those typically associated with the gig or platform economies, the evidence for which remains thin.

Rejection of the subsidiary proposition tested here implies that, if precarity is rising, it must in the UK take the form of declining job tenure in the context of predominantly standard, direct forms of employment. The following chapter will test this second subsidiary proposition.

7 Is employment tenure declining?

7.1 Introduction

In the preceding chapter the notion that the UK economy was experiencing the burgeoning of an array of non-standard forms of employment was called into question. However, as was demonstrated in chapter 3, precarity need not take the form of a rise in non-standard working. It could equally take the form of a rise in the contingency of permanent employment. This leads to a second subsidiary proposition: “Over the neoliberal period in the UK, there has been a secular decline in employment tenure.” This chapter tests this subsidiary proposition by looking at elapsed employment tenure from 1975 to 2015.

First, the approach to the data is explained. Then the tenure of the labour force in aggregate is examined. Following this, the tenure for particular groups of workers, according to occupational or demographic criteria, is examined.

7.2 The data on tenure

Two large household surveys are used here to measure tenure. The General Household Survey (GHS) can be used to construct a general picture stretching back to the mid-1970s, providing the longest possible series of data. However, this survey ceases publication just as the economic crisis of 2008-9 begins and therefore says nothing about a period of great interest. The Labour Force Survey (LFS) offers a more detailed picture, with a greater number of relevant variables, based on a larger survey, typically involving about 60,000 employed people, and is still ongoing. Here the GHS is used to obtain a long-term picture through the neoliberal period, while the LFS is used to focus on the period from 1992. While the LFS can be used reasonably confidently from at least the mid-1980s, it underwent substantial revisions from 1992 and the consistency of the data from this point makes it particularly helpful; prior to 1992, the LFS offers few advantages over the GHS (Gregg and Wadsworth, 2002, p.117). There are also known discontinuities in data, including that on job tenure and employment status, around 1992 (ONS, 2011, pp.99-100, 105-106).

Any survey of households will have drawbacks. The LFS, for instance, is fairly comprehensive as regards households but not communal establishments. It does not cover people based in student halls of residence and NHS housing, but not those in, say, nursing homes or residential care homes. However, the ONS estimates that in 2001 only about 81,000 employed people were omitted, roughly one tenth of a percent of the total population (ONS, 2011, pp.10-11). The broad scope of the survey, and the fact that it, like the GHS, aims to be representative of the population as a whole, makes it a suitable tool

for generating a picture of employment tenure across the labour force. Although the GHS is less comprehensive, covering only private households, it nonetheless encompasses the overwhelming majority of those in employment.

Both surveys are cross-sectional in nature, rather than panel-based, and so, while they can reveal overall trends, they cannot be used conclusively to demonstrate causality. There are several other issues with the data. First, for the GHS there is no data for 1997 or 1999 when the survey was not undertaken. In the graphs based on the GHS presented here, the data is simply linearly interpolated for these years. The LFS series is complete back to 1992.

Second, the survey year for the GHS, an annual survey, changes from a calendar year, which is used from 1975 to 1987, to a financial year, before changing back to a calendar year from 2005. For simplicity all years will be treated as calendar years (for instance, the 1998-9 financial year will be treated as 1998). Although the LFS, now a quarterly survey, did change from seasonal to calendar years, the data back to 1992 has been retrospectively made available on a consistent basis. Here the LFS data for April-June each year will be used. Third, the scope of the GHS survey is Great Britain; Northern Ireland is excluded. Similarly, data from Northern Ireland is not integrated into the LFS for 1993 or 1994 on a consistent basis, so all the Northern Irish records are removed from the data.

Fourth, the question asked about tenure in the GHS has not been entirely consistent. Initially, those surveyed were asked how long they had been with their current employer (or how long had they been self-employed). In later versions, they were asked when they started with their current employer. These questions could evoke slightly different responses. If the precise date is recorded, we would expect that the former question would produce spikes around calendar years, whereas the latter would tend to cluster around round counts of years—five or ten or 20, say. However, Farber (1995, p.5), who encountered similar problems analysing the US data, notes that there were no systematic differences during the transition and, additionally, in the case of the UK data, the early data is banded rather than reported in detail. In the LFS employees are asked in which year they started working for their current employer and, if it was less than eight years prior to the interview, what month they started; the same approach is taken in later versions of the GHS.

Fifth, the banding of tenure data in the GHS presents major issues. The tenure data in the GHS is banded up until 1998 but the bands are not consistent over time; indeed, they change six times over the period studied. From 1998 onwards the month and year during which the current job started is recorded, allowing greater accuracy. The LFS from 1992 does not present this difficulty as non-banded data is available but for the GHS estimation must be used. The method of estimation for the GHS data here is adapted from that of

Burgess and Rees (1996). The mean elapsed tenure prior to 1998 is estimated by taking the mid-point of each band as representative of the elapsed tenure for each band. This poses a problem for the estimation of the open upper band, where the upper band is simply given as “more than five” or “more than ten” years, as is the case in the years 1975-82, 1984 and 1991-6. Burgess and Rees address this problem by exploiting their observation that the distribution of these upper bands, for the years where we do have a better breakdown, seems quite stable, allowing the imputation of values for the upper bands when the breakdown is not given. Looking at the later data, to which Burgess and Rees did not have access, it seems that in more recent years the average tenure for those who have already been with an employer for five or ten years has in fact risen. It does, though, appear reasonably stable close to the years where a detailed breakdown is missing. Therefore a mean for each gender based on the extant data for 1983, 1985-90 and for 1998 is used to estimate the tenure of the upper end of the distribution for the years in which it is missing.

The same mean is used to extrapolate the pre-1983 data, though this is done with stronger reservations than those expressed by Burgess and Rees. There is little data the other side of the interval and, given that male tenure of over five years is falling and female tenure over five years is rising immediately after the interval, something of the trend might be lost here. Nonetheless, in the absence of a more detailed breakdown for the earlier years of the GHS there is little choice. An alternative such as using linear extrapolation would run the opposite risk of overstating the trends, which are expected to have both cyclical and secular components.

In 1983 and 1985-90, bands are specified up to a 40+ band. Those with their current employer for at least 40 years can safely be treated as having an elapsed tenure of 40 years. The number with such a long tenure is small (for instance, 1.1 percent of the total for 1983) and, given the age restrictions placed on the population, 40 years of continuous employment means that the person in question has been working for their current employer since they were 15 or younger. It can be assumed, therefore, that this band tails off sharply.

Where it is not appropriate to estimate the mean tenure in the manner indicated above, for instance where the population is broken down into subgroups, rather than re-estimating the upper tenure band, tenure is instead broken into three groups: less than one year, one to five years and greater than five years. This can be done consistently across the entire period. Unfortunately, no other breakdown into bands is possible for every year covered by the GHS.

In addition to these problems, there are choices that must be made with respect to the data. In both the case of the LFS and GHS, only those aged 16-64 are included in the data.

Although there are differences in the literature regarding the age range used, 16-64 is now the definition for “working age” men and women used by the Office for National Statistics (Nomis, 2010). Prior to 1996 the GHS does not include any weighting data, so here all values are unweighted. The LFS does offer weighting throughout the period from 1992, so the LFS data is weighted, this being another advantage the LFS offers in analysing the trend in recent years.

Finally, as noted in previous chapters, the number of people in self-employment has grown in recent years. Both the GHS and LFS provide data on the time spent as self-employed but including this raises the mean tenure figure and tends to increase it more in the recent period, as people spend longer in self-employment and as the number of those in self-employment increases. As the proposition here relates specifically to the *employment* relationship, and there is no means of including simply those in false self-employment, the self-employed are removed from the data.

7.3 The aggregate evolution of employment tenure

Figures 7.1 and 7.2 respectively show the mean elapsed tenure according to the GHS and the LFS. This is the mean period employees had been with their current employer at the time at which they were surveyed. Because of the problems of estimation from the GHS data the breakdown of tenure into bands for men and women is also shown in figures 7.3 and 7.4 using that data. The mean is used, rather than the median, because, based on the survey of earlier literature, it is noted that a fall in very long-term jobs among men is one factor that is supposed to have given rise to a decline in tenure. A shift from very long-term to long-term jobs would not necessarily be picked up by the median but would reduce the mean.

There is little evidence to support the proposition of falling tenure across the period, either from 1975 to 2008 or from 1992 to 2015. The data is deliberately shown with the y-axis extending down to zero to avoid exaggerating the changes. Certainly on the evidence of the aggregate data from the GHS and LFS long-term jobs remain a feature of the British labour market. In the steady state, the mean total tenure of employment could be anticipated to be about 16 years. By 2007 over half of men in the workforce had been with their current employer for more than five years, not far below the figure in the late 1970s. For women, the number with their employer for more than five years was at its highest level ever, approaching 50 percent.

Figure 7.1: Mean tenure of employment, overall and by gender (1975-2007)

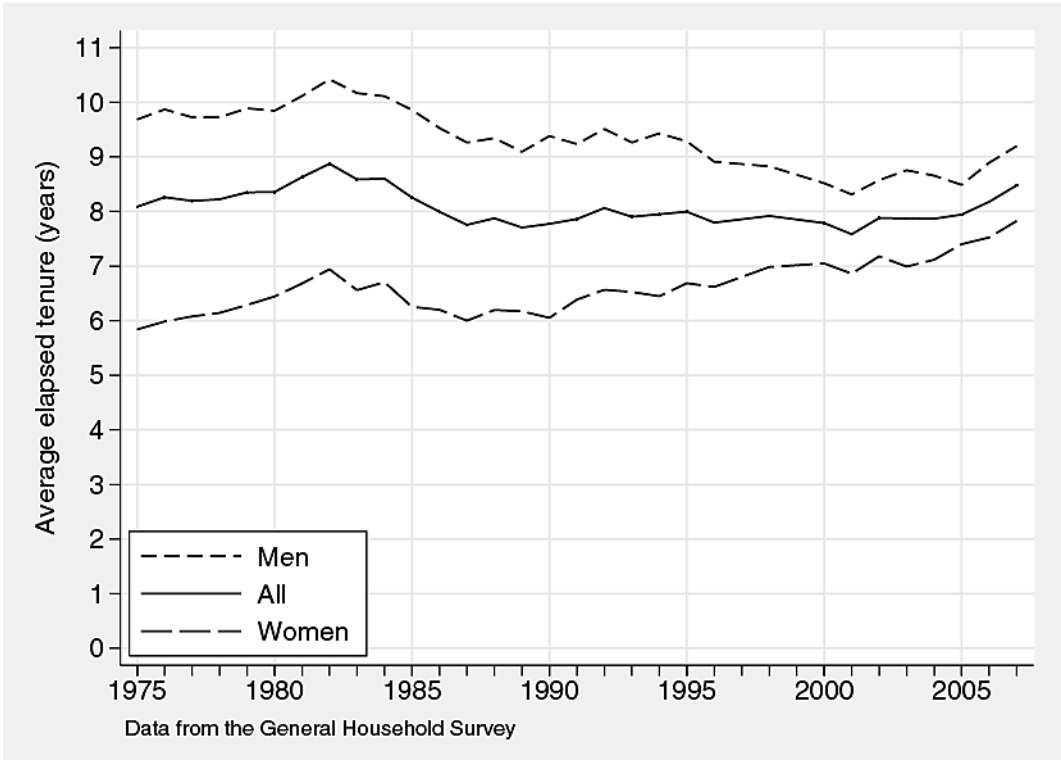
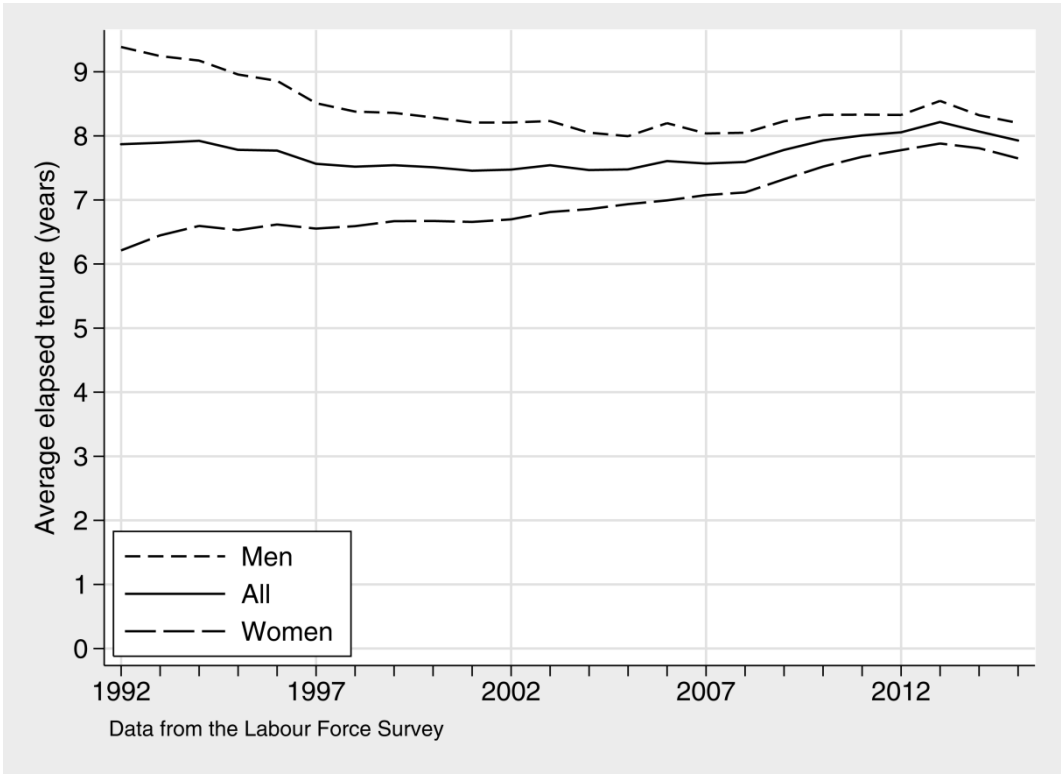


Figure 7.2: Mean tenure of employment, overall and by gender (1992-2015)

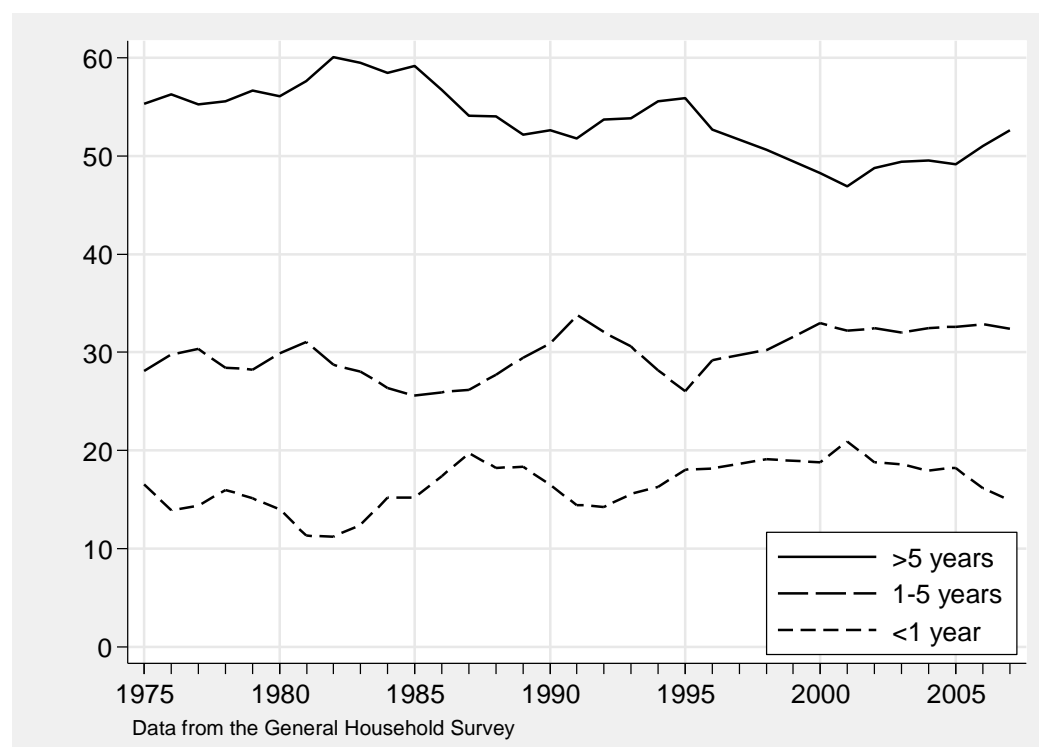


There does appear to be a secular decline in male tenure from the 1982 peak to 2001 after which it stabilises. However, given the countercyclical pattern (see section 3.4),

tenure of around ten years in 1975-82 was probably abnormally high. There were recessions both in 1975 and in 1980-1. Similarly, the LFS data depicted here begins in the wake of the 1990-1 recession. Nonetheless, if male tenure oscillates around the 9.5 years level from 1975-95, thereafter it was closer to 8.75 years in the GHS data, 8.25 in the LFS.

There is a particularly sharp decline in male tenure from 1982-9. This occurs in all sectors but it is most striking in “distribution and hotels” and “banking and finance”, where tenure fell by 31 percent and 23 percent respectively compared with a 13 percent fall for male workers across the labour force. In the case of banking, the largest subgrouping in the banking and finance sector in this period, there is evidence that this marks not so much the emergence of a novel set of employment relations as the end of relations that distinguished this sector from many others. The “quite extraordinary degree of labour and organisational stability” that had existed in this sector was dissolving in this period as, with the rapid growth of the UK financial sector, banks began to shed labour, brought in new technology, shifted their emphasis from administration to marketing of financial products and restructured their branch networks (Cressey and Scott, 1992, p.84). As this happened, a system in which “career progression was integral”, with employees often recruited as school leavers and remaining in employment until retirement, broke down, leading to greater “segmentation in recruitment and promotion patterns” (Storey, 1995, pp.38-39).

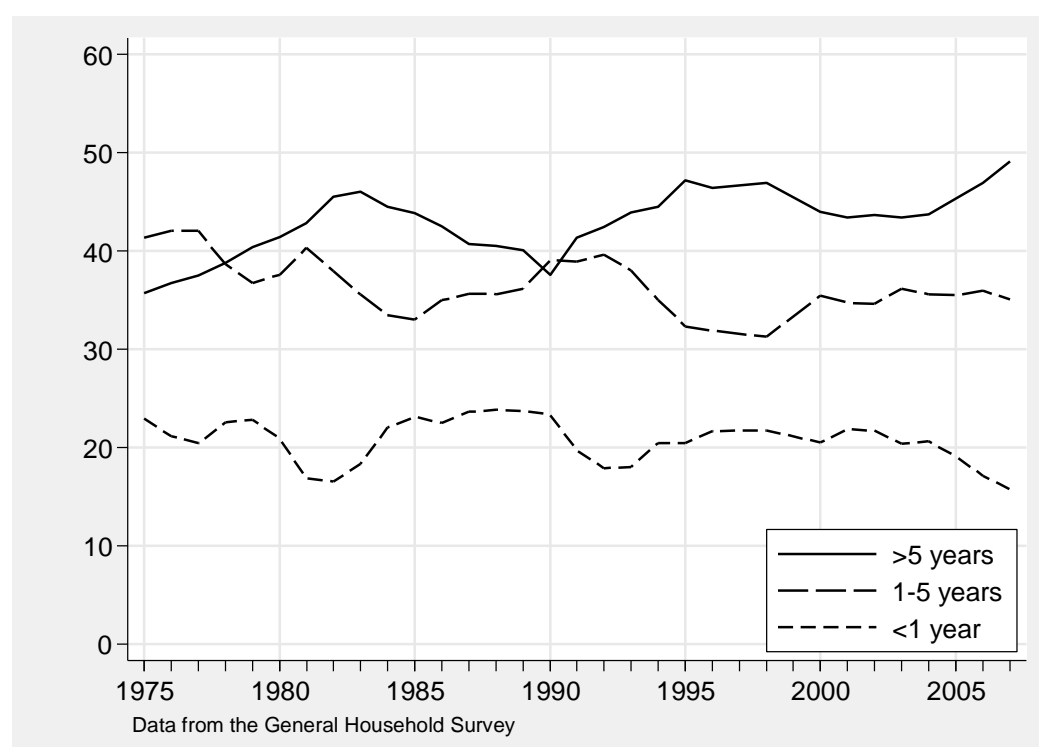
Figure 7.3: Tenure bands for employed men (1975-2007)



The distribution and hotels sector is dominated by retail. Here too there have been substantial changes, in particular a longer-term decline in small, privately owner retailers as the “rise of large multiple retailers...concentrated not only sales but also employment” (Sparks, 1992, p.13; Shackleton, 1998). Existing supermarket chains were engaged in a process of consolidating on “out of town” superstores (Upchurch and Donnelly, 1992, pp.66-67). The restructuring happening in retail and banking reflect intensifying competition in both areas in the 1980s, which forced units of capital to reorganise in order to sustain themselves in the face of these competitive pressures. But once the restructuring has taken place, the trends in these sectors are consonant with those in the wider economy.

The fall in male employment tenure is in contrast to the long secular rise in female tenure. This leads to a striking convergence in mean tenure between men and women, from a gap of almost four years in 1975 to about 18 months in 2007. The LFS data shows how dramatic the convergence has been over the period from 1992, closing from three years to less than one year by 2015 on this data. The reasons for this shift are explored in more detail in section 7.5.

Figure 7.4: Tenure bands for employed women (1975-2007)



The overall picture is of a convergence of tenure towards a level of about eight years. The breakdown of tenure into the three bands (figures 7.3 and 7.4) tells much the same story

as the estimated movement of mean tenure. Tenure does also appear to be countercyclical, as expected from previous literature.

There are two qualifications to the countercyclical evolution of tenure. First, for women the secular increase predominates from 1990 in both data sets. Second, from 2001 to 2003, and again from 2005, tenure rises for men, according to the GHS. The more comprehensive and weighted data in the LFS tells a slightly different story, yet even here male tenure is stable in the run up to the crisis, rather than falling. As noted, the cyclical pattern depends to a large degree on the propensity for workers to undergo voluntary separations. It may be that some groups of male workers felt less confident to leave their jobs in the 2000s. Although the UK did not experience a recession in this period, the US did experience a downturn from spring 2001, with heavy job losses in 2001 and 2002. In the UK there were highly publicised job losses in manufacturing from 1999 onwards (PWC, 2009, p.13).

In the wake of the recession of 2008-9, which had a substantial long-term impact on the economy, tenure is seen to rise, as expected. In 2013 it reached its peak for the period since 1992 before falling back slightly.

7.4 The pattern of redundancies

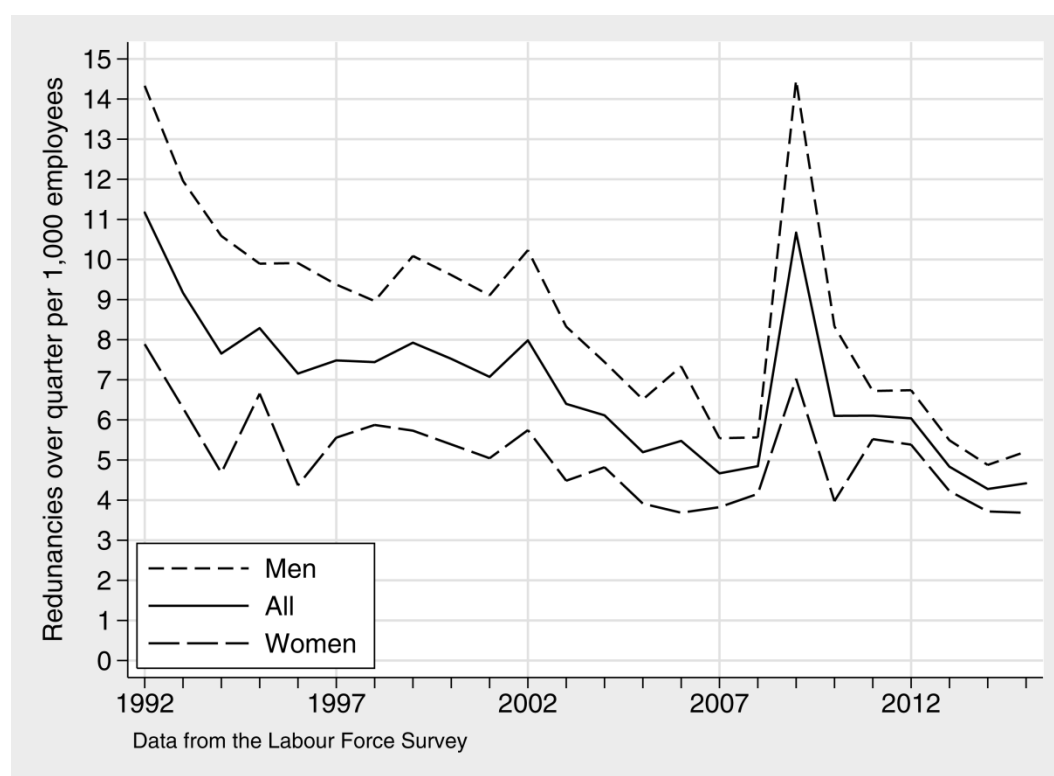
The picture of relative stability is reinforced if the redundancy rate is considered. Here the rate is estimated using LFS data. The number of involuntary job losses over the three months prior to the interview forms the numerator; total employment is the denominator. Again Northern Ireland is excluded, as are those outside the 16-64 age range. This quarterly redundancy rate is calculated each year for the April-June quarter and is multiplied by 1,000 to give a rate per thousand workers.

Figure 7.5 shows the pattern since 1992. Even taking into account the fact that the data begins in the wake of the early 1990s recession, there has been a general downward movement in redundancies through the period, interrupted by the brief surge in the 2009 data. While the 2008-9 recession produced a spike in redundancies, the figure rapidly fell to a level only slightly above that prior to the crisis, before continuing its downward trend, reaching a new low point in 2014. A slight upturn in redundancy in 2002 (and the plateau in the data prior to that) may also help to explain the unexpected rise in tenure for men around this time, noted in the previous section.

When broken down by gender, it is clear that the redundancy rate is lower for women than for men across the period, and the decline for women is more muted. Again there is also convergence between men and women. Interestingly, there is also a second spike for women in the wake of the economic crisis in 2011-12 (which is a plateau for the male

figures). This probably reflects the concentration of job losses in the public sector after David Cameron’s coalition government administration took power in May 2010. By spring 2011, 21 percent of those made redundant in the LFS gave their prior employment as “public administration, education and health”, compared with 11 percent a year earlier. Women are overrepresented in the public sector and made up 70 percent of those made unemployed in this sector in the three months prior to the spring 2011 survey. This affirms the prediction by Rubery and Rafferty (2013), discussed in section 3.5.1 above. Earlier job losses were concentrated in sectors dominated by male employment, such as construction or manufacturing, or more evenly balanced, such as in distribution, finance and banking—though, as noted in section 3.5.1 above, women may have been hit disproportionately even here.

Figure 7.5: Quarterly redundancy rate (1992-2015)



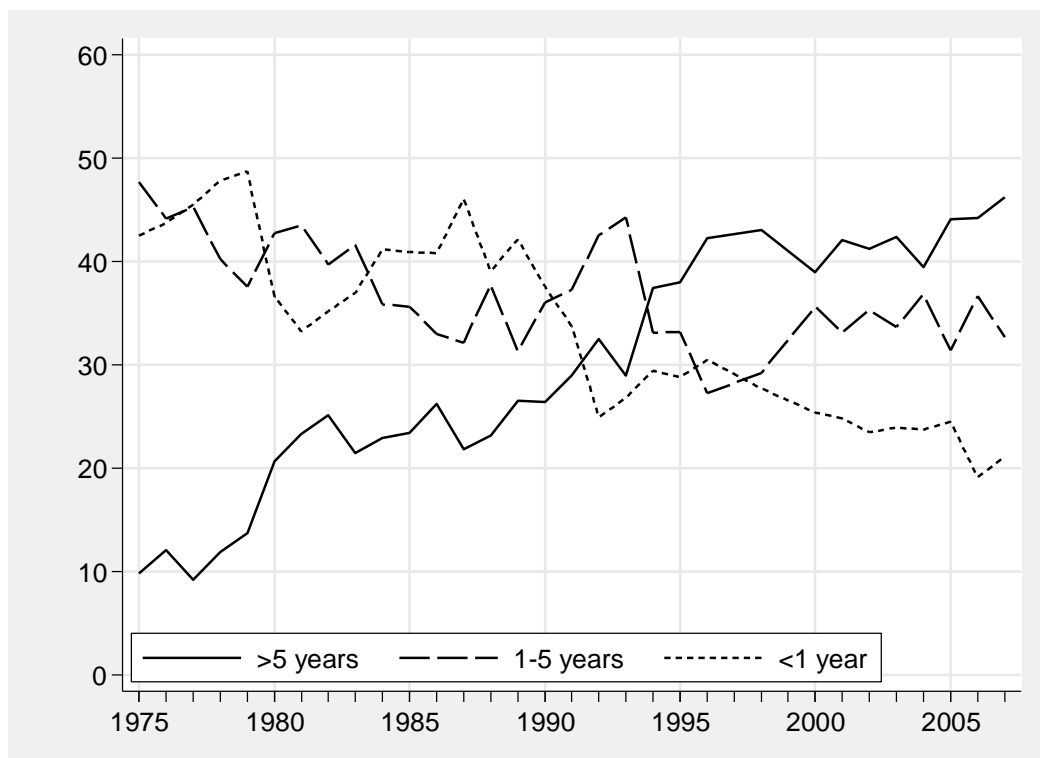
Overall, the pattern of redundancies does not support the notion of a contingent, disposable workforce. On the contrary, employers seem to be increasingly reluctant to shed employees. Not only do voluntary quits shape patterns of employment tenure more than involuntary (Heap, 2005, p.232), but changes in tenure are shaped *increasingly* by voluntary quits by workers.

7.5 Female employment, part-time work and tenure

Among the biggest transformations of the UK labour force in the post-war period has been the growth of the female labour force from 34.1 percent in 1959 to 49.6 percent in 1996, a level at which it has remained since (Walby, 1999, p.197; Noon and Blyton, 2007, p.36). The convergence between male and female tenure shows the extent to which female employment has today become a stable and integrated section of the labour force.

The long-term growth of female tenure is particularly pronounced among women with children under the age of five (figure 7.6). This suggests that an important part is played in this story by legislative changes allowing women to return to their prior employment after taking maternity leave. The two surges in employment tenure for women with young children occur from 1977 to 1982 and from 1987 to 1996. This likely reflects the introduction of legislation, including the Employment Protection Act of 1975, which secured “the right to return to work for up to 29 weeks after confinement for women who had been employed for two years continuously with the same employer”, and the 1994 Pregnant Workers Directive, which enforced “14 weeks’ maternity leave” regardless of length of service. These changes were further extended and consolidated in a 1999 act (Sargeant, 2003, p.336). In other words, for women, the neoliberal period has been a time of growing *stability* of employment. This cannot be an afterthought for those considering changes to employment over recent decades.

Figure 7.6: Tenure bands for women with children under 5 (1975-2007)



From the late 1990s until 2007, as the LFS data shows, the rise of tenure for women with younger children ceases, though the rise in female tenure generally was also modest (figure 7.7). After the 1999 act, subsequently legislation, in 2002 and 2010, was largely concerned with extending paternity rights to men, rather than marking any substantive change to the situation for women. The growth in the cost of childcare in the UK might also have placed new limits on the ability of women with children to return to work since the 2008-9 crisis (see, for instance, Sands, 2012).

The findings here are broadly in line with other research, based on surveys of mothers in the UK such as the Maternity and Paternity Rights survey carried out by the government. By 2002, 80 percent of women who had previously worked returned to work within 13-17 months after giving birth, compared to 45 percent who returned within nine months in 1988—with the different timescales considered reflecting different maternity entitlements in the different periods (Hudson et al, 2004, pp.111-112). However, this figure was more or less unchanged in 2008, with 77 percent returning to work when the child was aged 12-18 months (Chanfreau et al, 2011, p.70).

The driving forces for the changes to women's tenure are considered in detail in chapter 8. Growing tenure for women does, of course, not imply equality in employment. Women remain overrepresented in some areas of the labour force and underrepresented in others, and continue to face lower average pay (Bradley et al, 2000, pp.76-78). One other noticeable difference is that part-time work, which has grown over the period, is disproportionately undertaken by women, who are forced to balance childcare with employment, as noted in section 3.5.1.

However, this does not automatically make women in those roles a precarious part of the labour force. Figure 7.8 shows the tenure bands for men and for women who work 30 hours a week or less (used as a definition of part-time working in the UK's national statistics), according to the GHS data. Figure 7.9 shows the more recent evolution of mean tenure for men and women who report that they are part time, based on LFS data.

According to figure 7.8, prior to 1992 men working part-time witnessed a decline in long-tenure employment and a rise in short-tenure employment. As is clear from figure 7.9, this continues to manifest itself in a falling mean tenure for men in part-time employment right through to 1997, when it levels out before rising to over four years. For women, who make up the vast majority of part-time workers, the pattern is different. There appears to be a rise in tenure from 1975 to about 1983 (figure 7.8) by which time women's tenure in part-time employment seems to be higher on average than that of men. From 1992, as the LFS data shows, mean tenure for women in part-time work has consistently been above that of men and has consistently risen. Even more strikingly, by 2015 the gap between part-time and full-time tenure for women was less than six months.

Figure 7.7: Mean tenure for women with/without children under 5 (1992-2015)

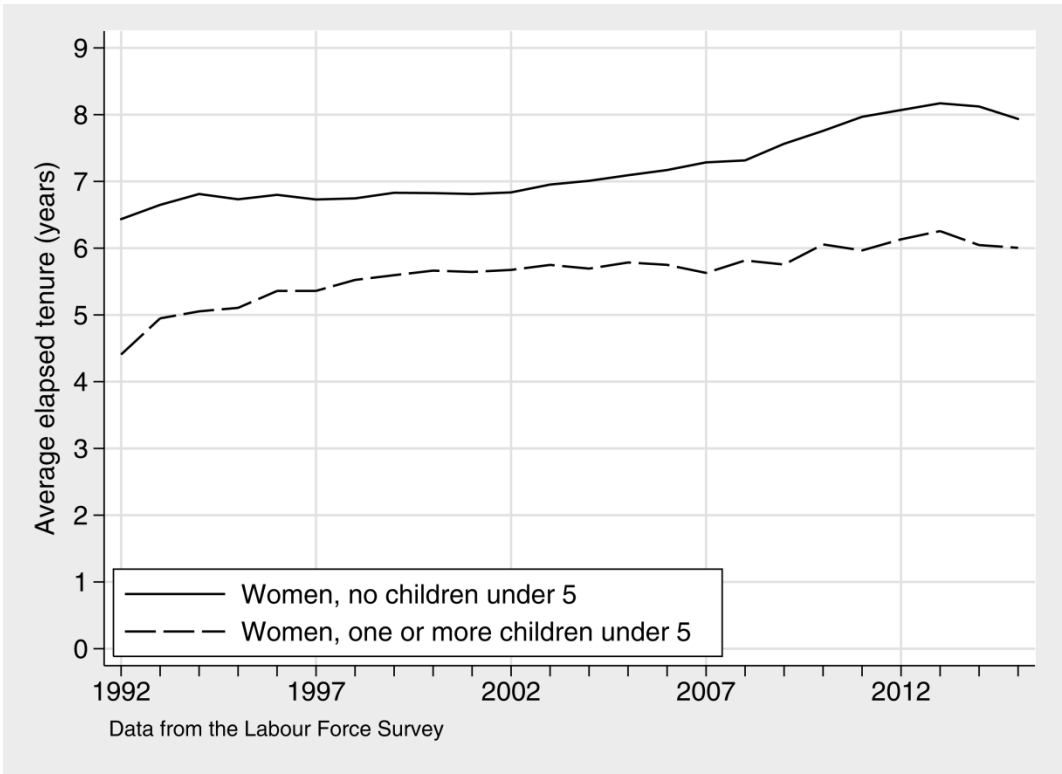


Figure 7.8: Tenure bands for part-time workers (1975-2007)

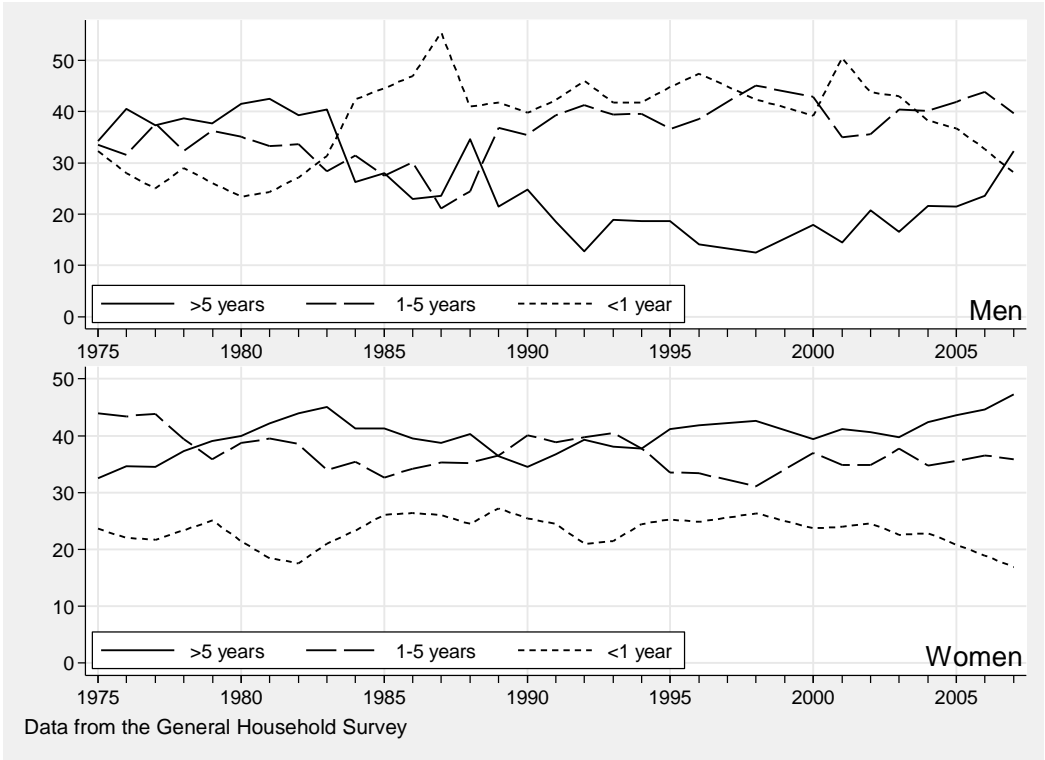
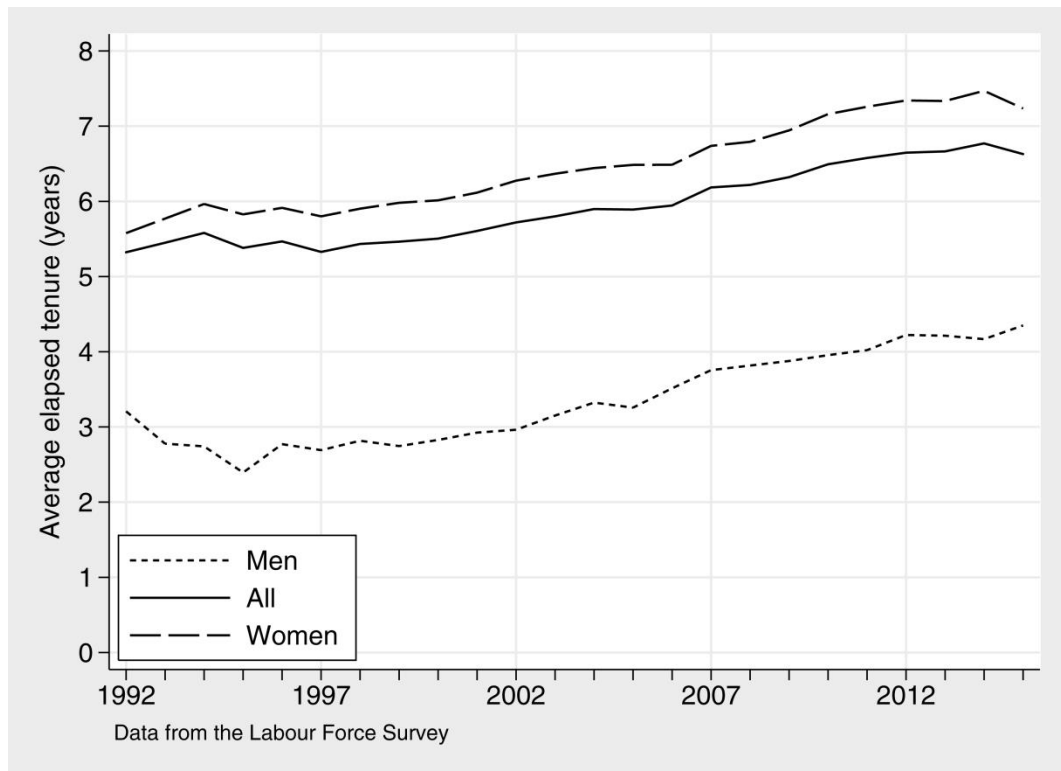


Figure 7.9: Mean tenure of part-time workers (1992-2015)

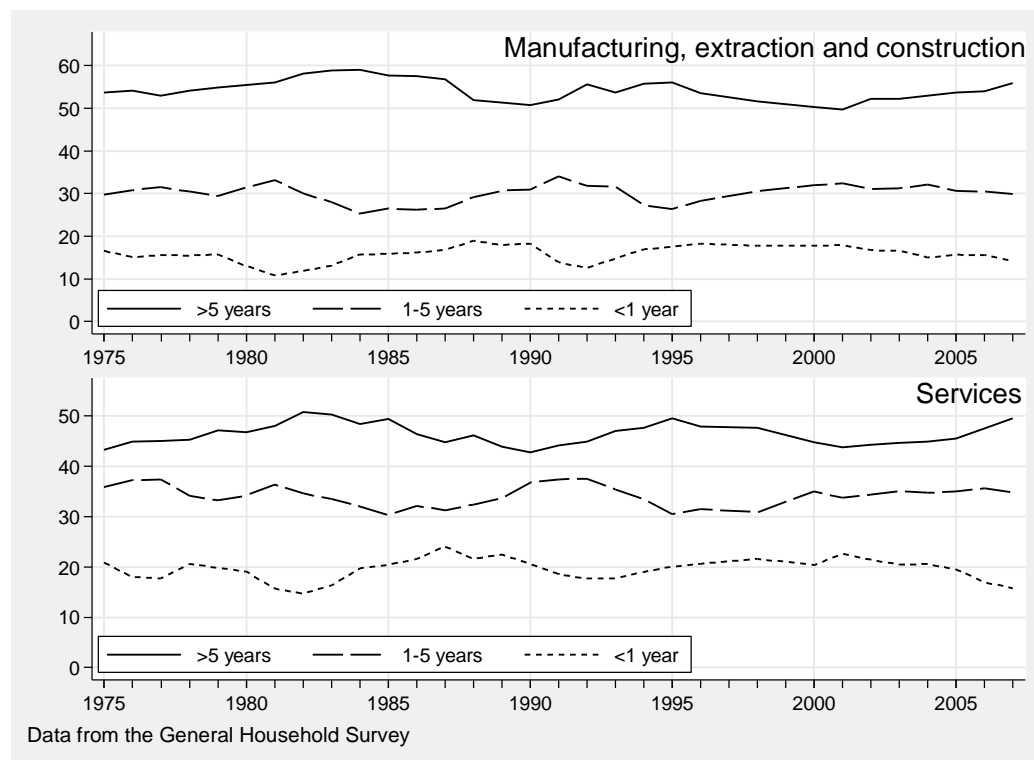


There is no sense in which part-time jobs held by women can be seen as inherently contingent. The absence of a system of freely available childcare that would allow more women to work full time, along with greater gender equality in terms of childcare responsibility or wages, should be condemned and challenged. In this sense, working part-time is an “accommodated” preference, rather than a “real” preference, reflecting the “impossibility of balancing a full-time job with family care” (Gash, 2008). However, given current conditions of gender inequality, part-time work must be seen as a form of *integration* of women into the workforce, not a form of marginalisation.

7.6 Tenure by job type

It is possible that the aggregate patterns observed so far conceal pools of short tenure in particular areas of employment. Of course, if the data is broken down sufficiently finely, groups of precarious workers can always been identified, as noted in chapter 3. However, there is no evidence for precarity across broader sectors of the economy. The GHS data shows stability in both manufacturing and services (figure 7.10).

Figure 7.10: Tenure bands by broad sector (1975-2007)

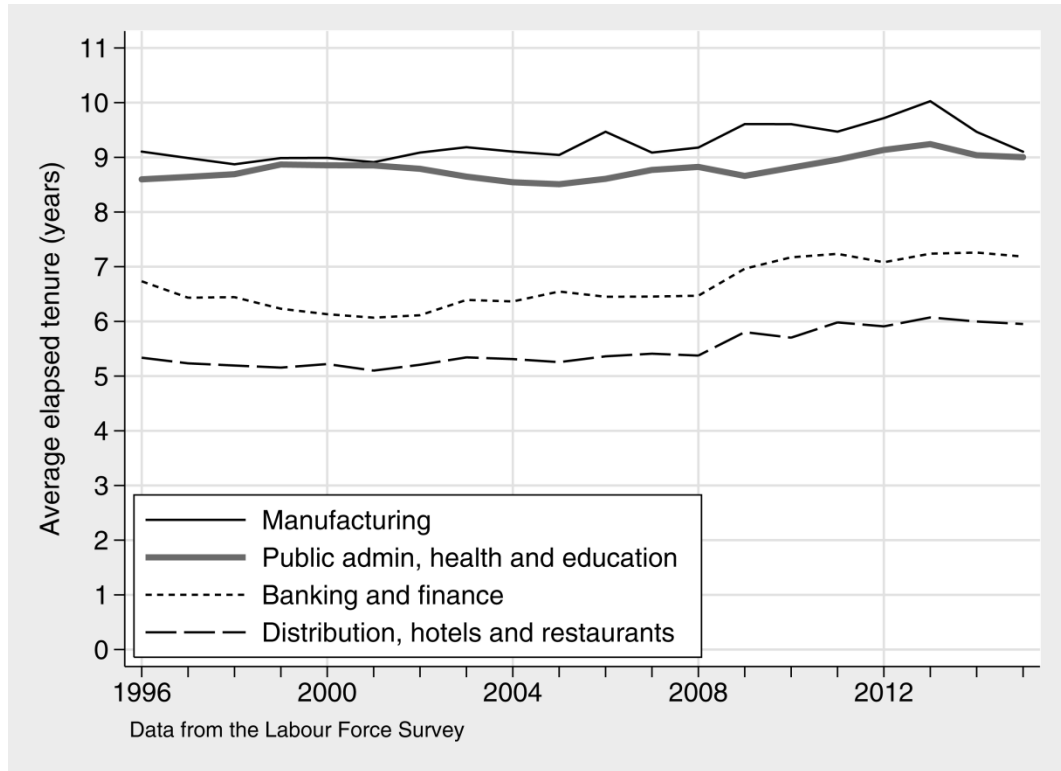


Due to changes in classifications over the period, a more detailed breakdown is difficult. However, with a little work, the LFS provides a more detailed picture from 1996 onward. Here figure 7.11 shows the recent evolution of tenure for the four largest sectors—manufacturing; public administration, health and education; banking and finance; and distribution, hotels and restaurants. All four show relatively stable job tenure across the period, with rises in each since the recession of 2008-9. There are sustained differences between sectors, with manufacturing showing the longest tenures and distribution, hotels and restaurants the lowest. Some of the reasons for these disparities are considered theoretically in chapter 8. But in no area does there seem to be an endless march towards precarity. Indeed, it might be expected that mean tenure would have fallen *more* during the neoliberal period, given the growth of sectors with a lower typical tenure and the decline of those such as manufacturing with a longer tenure.

Tenure can also be broken down by occupational group for the period since 1992. Again, as figure 7.12 shows, the mean tenure has been fairly stable across all groups, with some variations between them. Managers in particular have consistently had a long tenure. Clerical work, one of the lowest tenure occupations in 1992, has seen tenures grow, overtaking plant and machine operatives around the time of the crisis. Sales work seems to have experienced tenure growth in the wake of the crisis, perhaps as people have held

on to traditionally short-term, low waged work for fear of dropping out of the labour force altogether.

Figure 7.11: Mean tenure by sector (1996-2015)



In line with the earlier literature, larger workplaces also seem to have, consistently over time, higher mean tenure (figure 7.13), but again the trend is fairly stable since 1992 in all cases.

The LFS data can also be broken down into permanent employment and that deemed to be “temporary in some way”, as shown in figure 7.14.

As would be expected, permanent jobs tend to be longer in tenure, by a margin of about five and a half years. Yet there is no evidence that temporary jobs are of declining tenure: temporary employment does not appear to be becoming *more* temporary. It is however true that in periods of crisis it is far easier for employees to dispense with temporary employees. Note that the tenure of temporary employment after 2008-9 declines very slightly, whereas permanent employee tenure rises.

Figure 7.12: Mean tenure by occupational group (1992-2015)

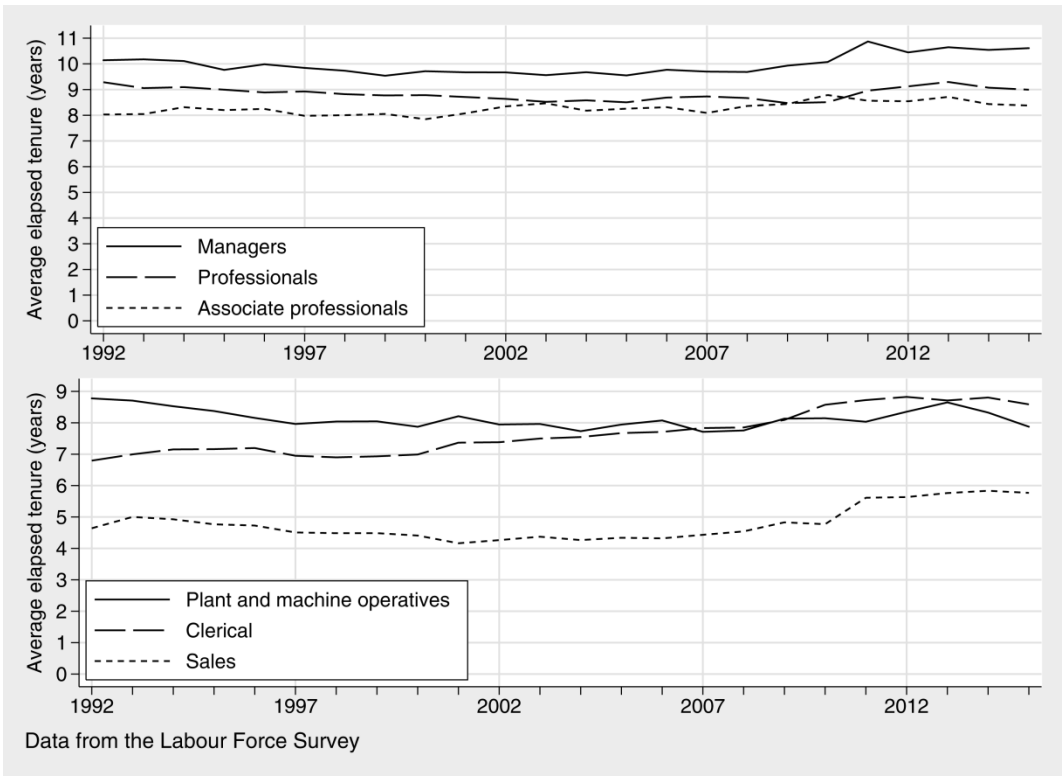


Figure 7.13: Mean tenure by workplace size (1992-2015)

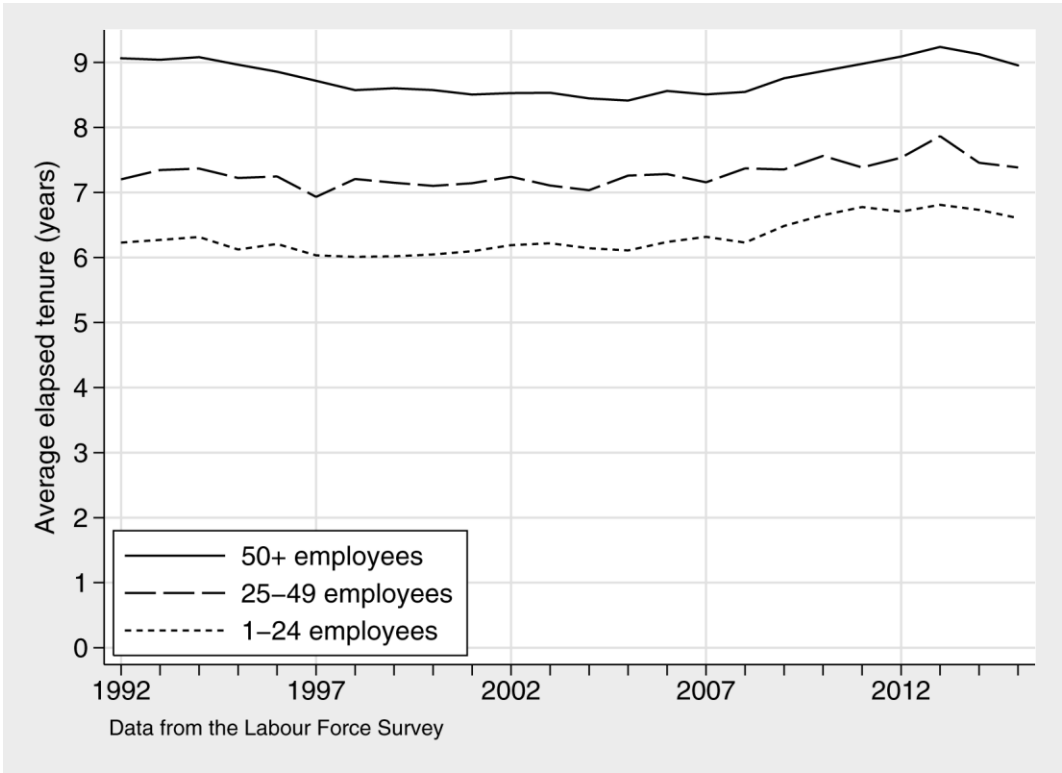
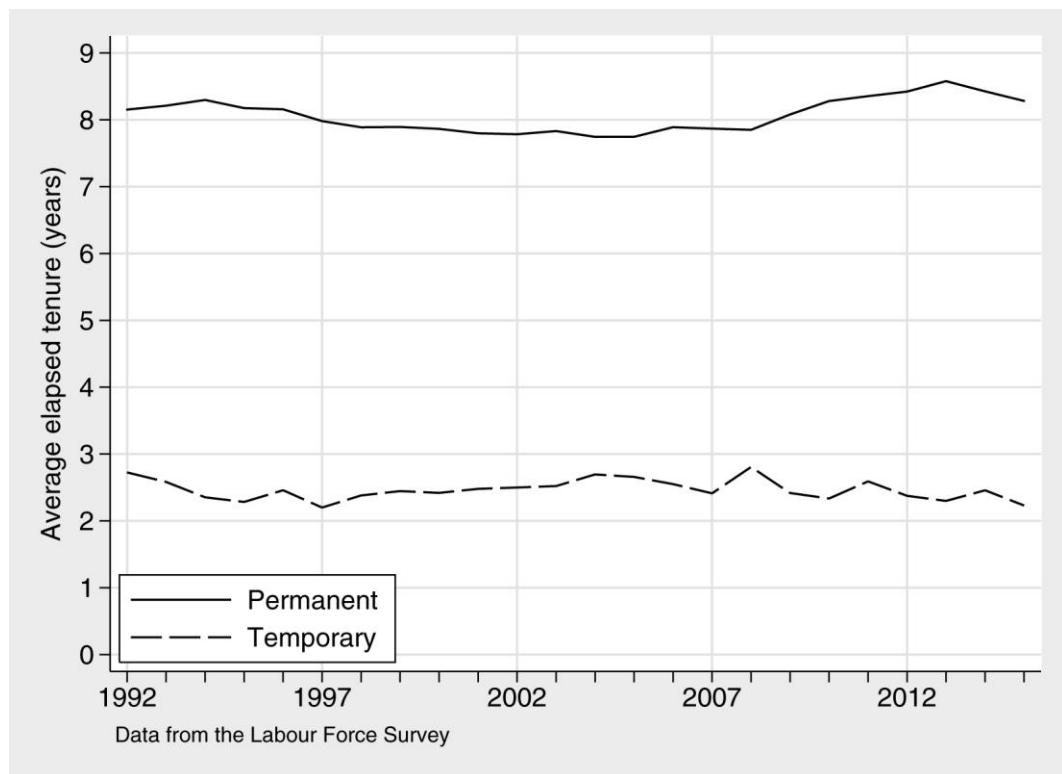


Figure 7.14: Mean tenure by contract type (1992-2015)



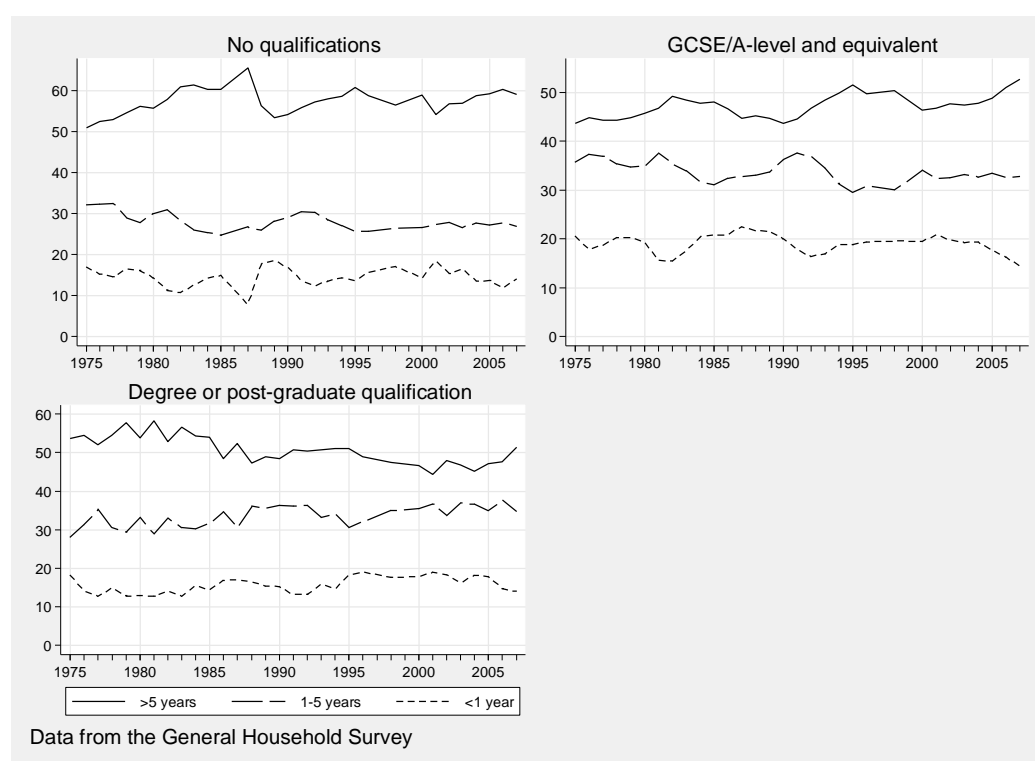
7.7 Tenure by employee characteristics

Along with distinct types of job, the data can be broken down by different types of employees. For instance, tenure can be studied for groups with differing educational qualification (figures 7.15 and 7.16). Contrary to what might be expected, unqualified people appear to have on average longer tenures than those with qualifications. This is presumably due to the limited opportunities to move to other jobs for the unqualified. By contrast, those with degrees have shorter tenures, and these declined from 1992 until 2002, stabilising at around seven years.

However, those in lower income jobs, especially those below the 25th percentile, do seem to experience persistently lower tenure, though this seems to have risen from the mid-1970s and stabilised in the mid-1980s. The highest 25th percent by income have seen a modest fall in tenure, while the tenure for the middle 50 percent has witnessed fairly steady average tenure (figures 7.17 and 7.18). While the results for income levels might seem to contradict those for educational qualifications, in fact it is precisely those with

highest educational levels in low income jobs who seem to experience low tenure—an average of about three years in the 1990s or early 2000s, compared to seven and a half years for those with no qualifications. In other words, those with qualifications tend to seek a route out of low income work, lowering their tenure. In this sense, increased stability of employment is not necessarily beneficial to workers. On the contrary, declining tenure can be a sign of *upward* mobility and long tenure can indicate workers are trapped in poor quality or badly paid jobs. This point will be developed in section 8.8 below.

Figure 7.15: Tenure bands by educational qualification (1975-2007)



One genuinely dramatic shift that does seem to have taken place in the recent period is the convergence between the tenure of white UK-born and non-white UK-born employees of both genders (figure 7.19). This is another tendency pointing towards declining precariousness and increased integration among a section of the workforce historically seen as marginalised.

Figure 7.16: Mean tenure by educational qualification (1992-2015)

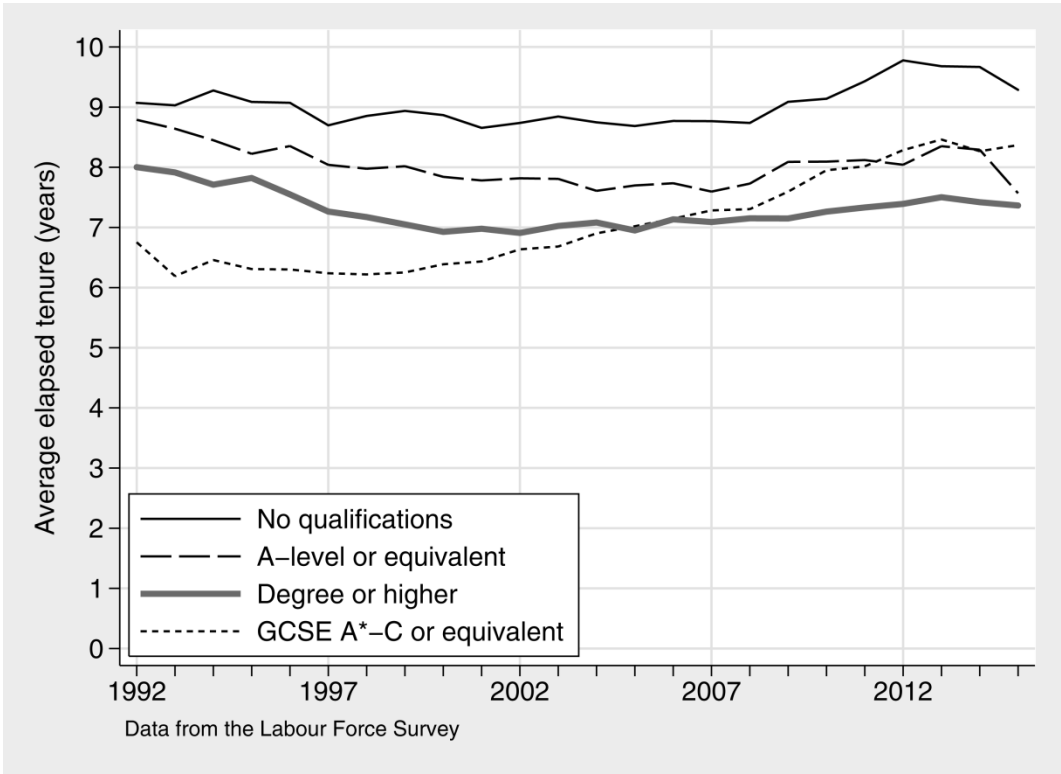


Figure 7.17: Tenure bands for by pay, full-time employees only (1975-2007)

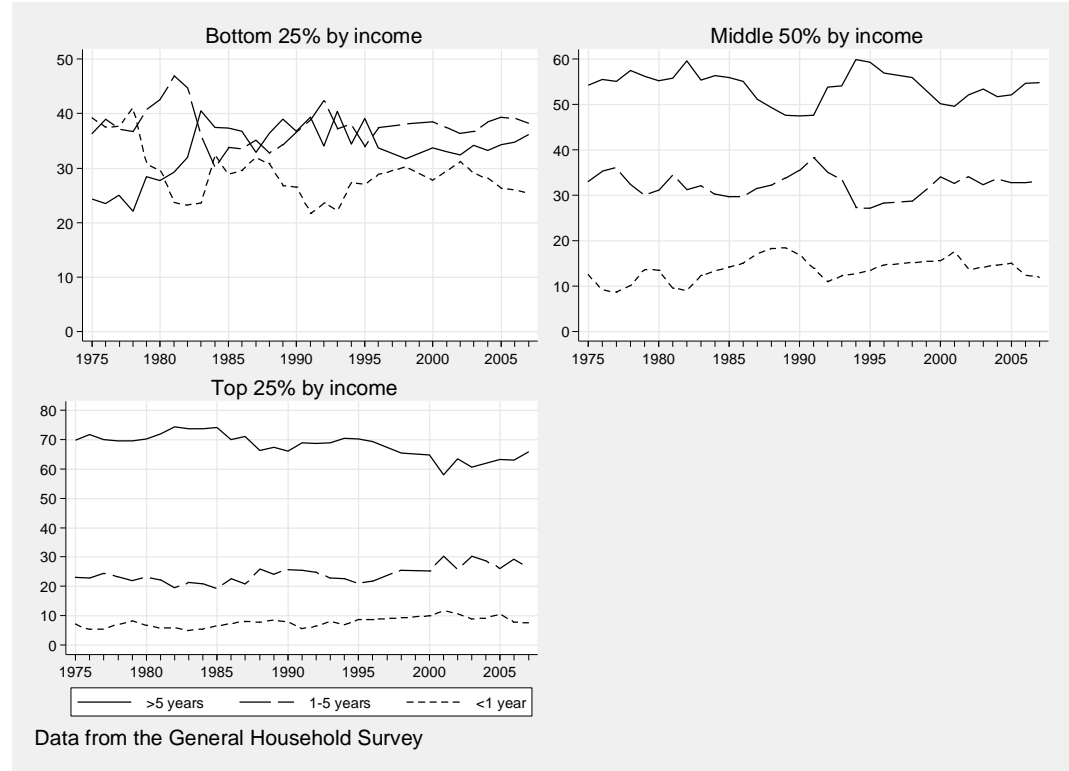


Figure 7.18: Mean tenure by pay, full-time employees only (1993-2015)

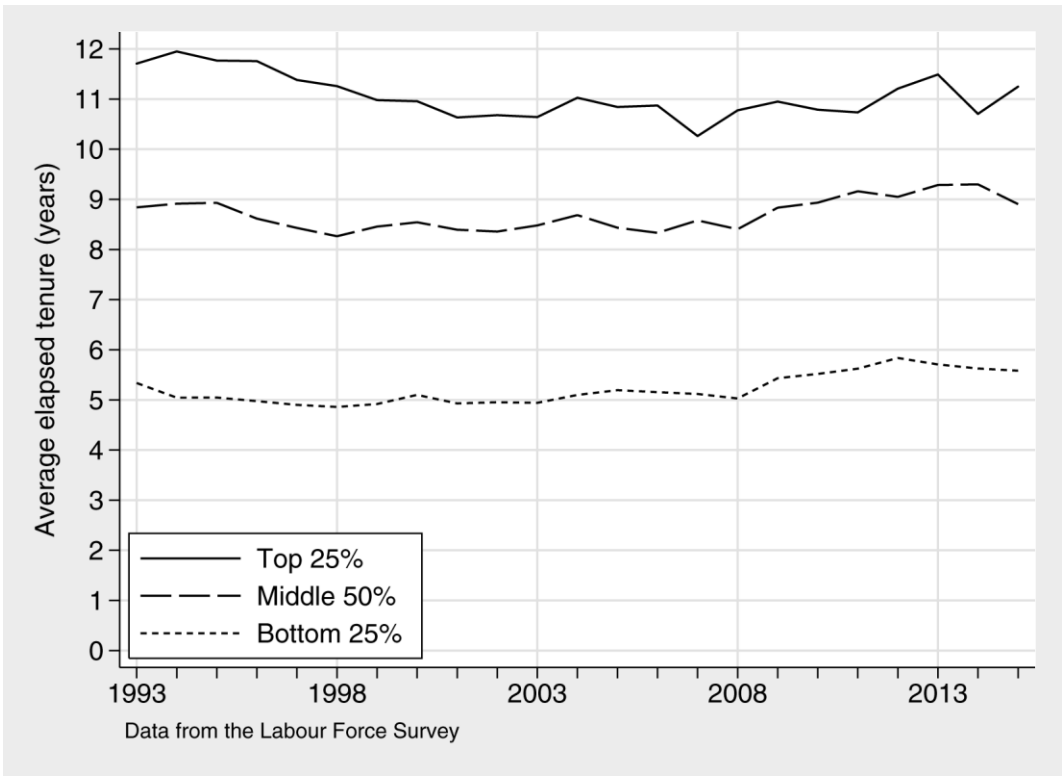
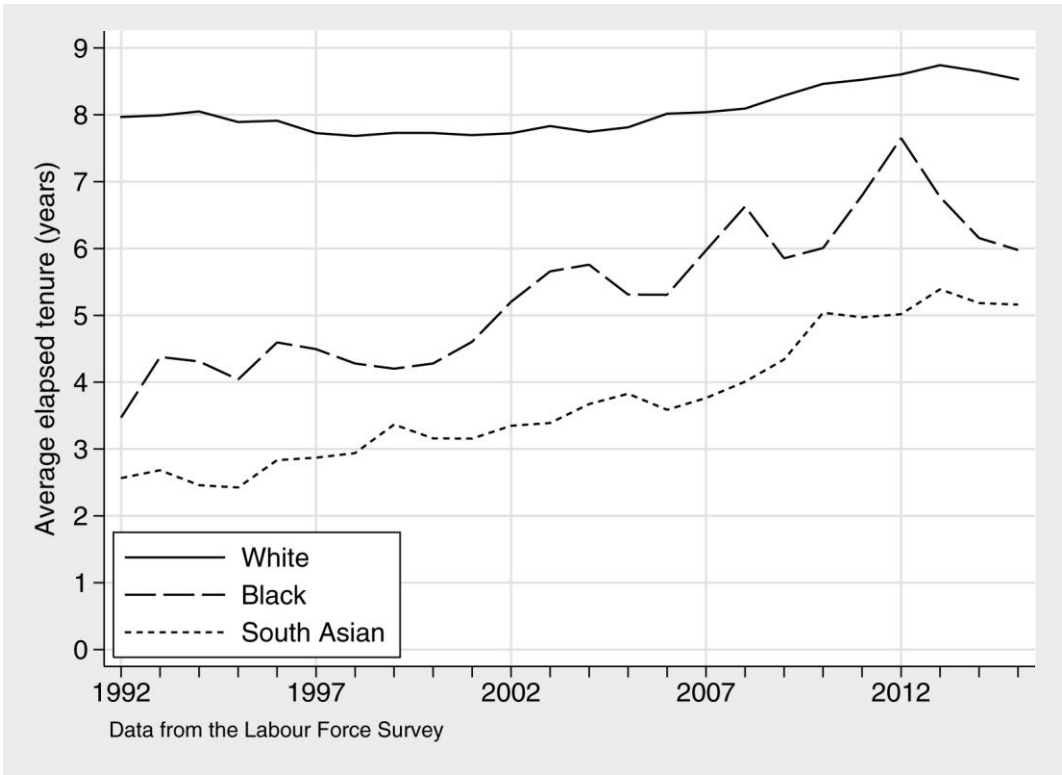


Figure 7.19: Mean tenure for UK-born employees by ethnicity (1992-2015)

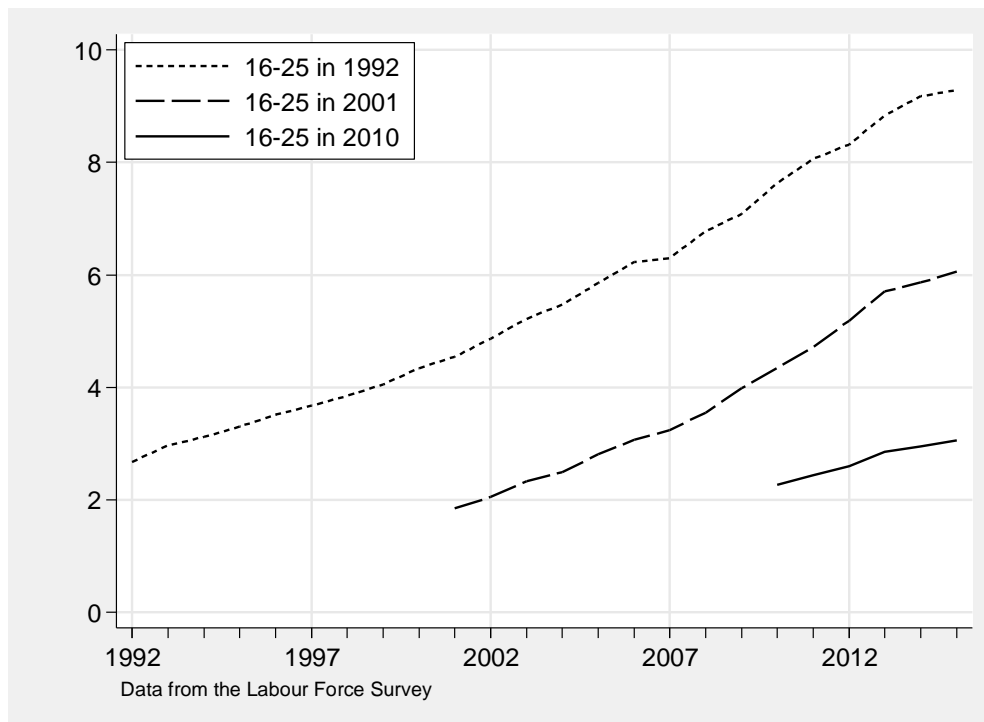


7.8 Younger workers

Younger workers are widely viewed as precarious. By virtue of having joined the labour market more recently younger people will necessarily have shorter tenures, making comparisons with older workers meaningless; instead the focus here is on how their tenure has evolved. A preliminary analysis of GHS data indicates a decline for younger workers only from the mid-1990s, justifying a focus on the LFS data covering this period.

Figure 7.20 shows tenure among employees by age cohort, excluding those in full-time education. The mean age at which non-students aged 16-25 left their education rose by about a year from 1992 to 2010 (from 16.9 to 17.9 years). It would therefore be surprising if mean tenure were as high in later years, given this delayed entry into the labour market. Nonetheless, the gradient of the tenure path for those aged 16-25 in 1992 and those aged 16-25 in 2001 is similar. If there is a decline in the rate of increase of tenure it is among the most recent cohort, aged 16-25 in 2010, many of whom entered the labour market in the wake of the recent crisis. Even here, however, this cohort started from a higher average tenure that the 2001 cohort and so, by 2015, had reached the same mean tenure as the 2001 cohort had by the equivalent stage. The decline in the gradient of the most recent cohort may be significant in the future, reflecting the difficulties that the UK economy has in creating decent jobs in an era of stagnating productivity and investment. But it is too early to say how sustained this development will be.

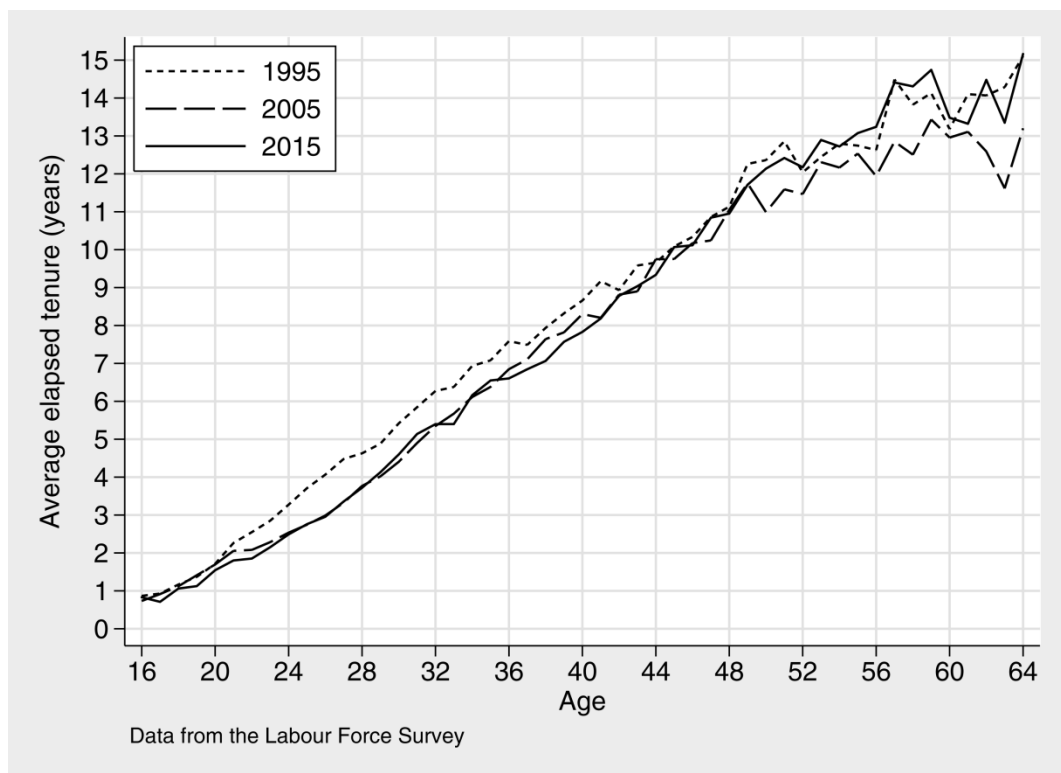
Figure 7.20: Tenure by age cohort (1992-2015)



7.9 An aging workforce and tenure

As noted above, tenure is inevitably sensitive to age. The general pattern has remained much the same over the period covered by the LFS data, as is shown in figure 7.21. Although it may be that tenure has declined a little among younger workers since 1995, perhaps reflecting the later entry of young people into the labour market, there is a consistent rate of increase in tenure with age, and a consistent levelling out from about 50 years of age.

Figure 7.21: Mean tenure by age (1995, 2005, 2015)



This raises the question of whether a reduction of tenure among workers in general is masked by an overall aging of the workforce. However, it is clear from figure 7.22 that, among men, the most pronounced declines in tenure have come among older men: 52-64 year olds prior to the early 2000s and then 40-51 year olds until the economic crisis of 2008-9. For women, as figure 7.23 shows, there has been, by contrast, a steady rise in tenure among 40-51 year olds and, from the early 2000s among 52-64 year olds. This presumably reflects the effects of improved maternity rights feeding through into older groups.

Figure 7.22: Mean tenure by age group, men (1992-2015)

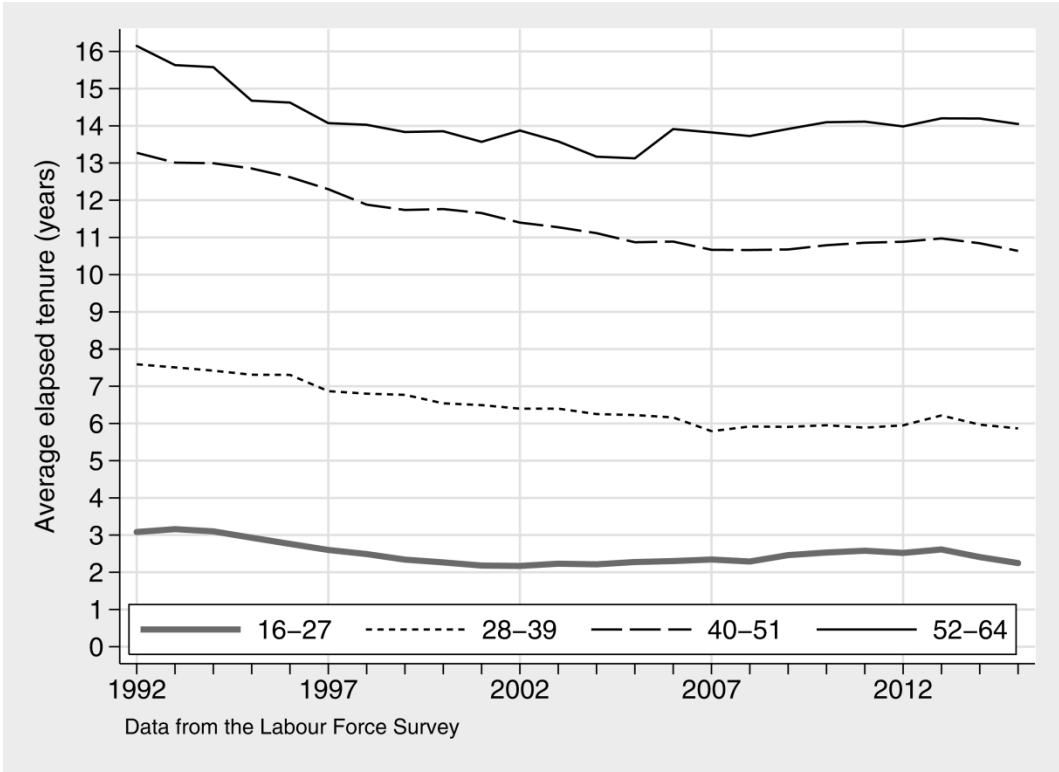
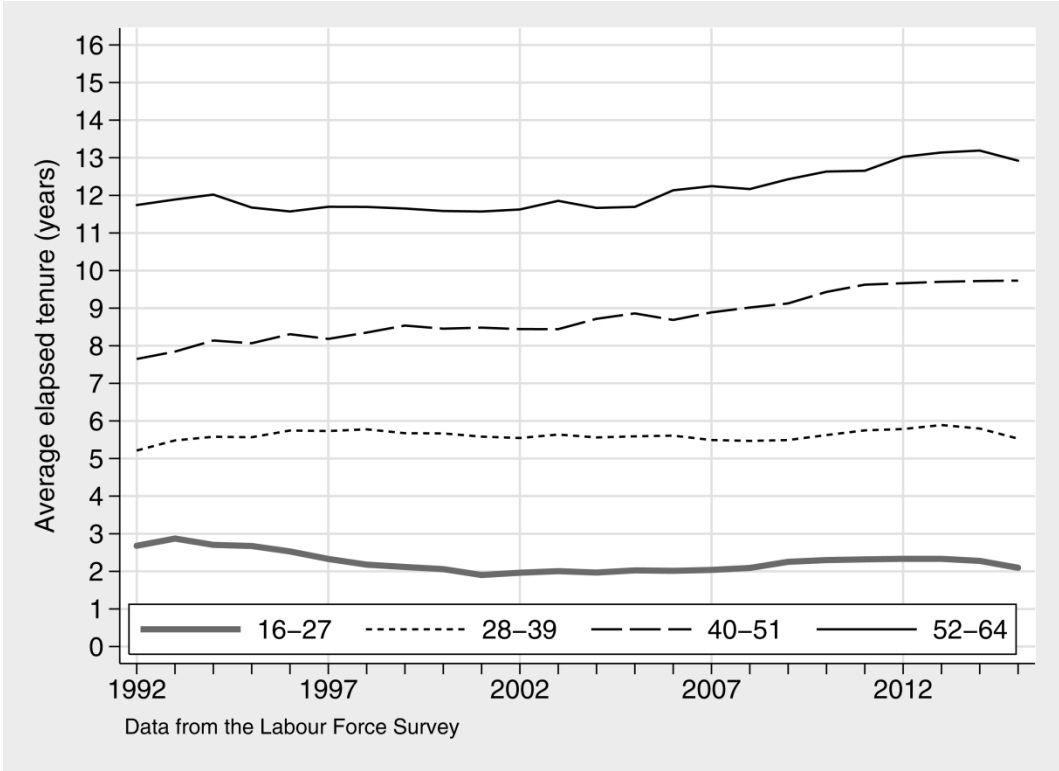


Figure 7.23: Mean tenure by age group, women (1992-2015)



7.10 Summary

The subsidiary proposition, that there has been a decline in employment tenure due to the increasing contingency of employment, is not upheld by the analysis in the chapter. While for some demographic or sectoral groups tenure may have declined, for others it has clearly increased, creating a picture of relative aggregate stability of tenure. The main trends are summarised in table 7.1.

Table 7.1: The evolution of tenure

| Period | Trends |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| Crisis years: 1975-82 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Rising tenure overall in the wake of the mid-1970s and early 1980s crises.• Sharp increase in tenure for women with children under five as new legislation introduced. |
| Neoliberal restructuring: 1983-90 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Falling tenure overall as the economy revives.• Sharp declines in male tenure, especially in banking and retail as these sectors are restructured.• Further increases in tenure for women with children under five from 1987 in the wake of new legislation. |
| The nineties: 1991-7 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• After an initial post-crisis rise, tenure stabilises then falls modestly.• Further increases in tenure for women with children under five.• Gender convergence as male tenure falls and female tenure rises. |
| The New Labour years: 1998-2007 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Stable tenure overall.• Further convergence in male and female tenure.• Steady rise in tenure for part-time employees. |
| Great recession: 2008-13 | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Rising tenure in the wake of the economic crisis.• Tenure rises particularly rapidly for women without children. |
| An uncertain recovery: 2014- | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Falling tenure with recovery.• Tentative evidence of declining tenure among youngest workers. |

Tenure across the labour force proved, on aggregate, quite stable through the neoliberal period, with the typical employee in 2015 in a job that they can expect, on average, to last for 16 years, roughly the same as in 1975. Not only that but, while male tenure has declined somewhat, this is compensated for by a rise in female tenure, driven in part by improved maternity rights. This greater integration of women into the labour force on long-term basis is not a sideshow to the evolution of employment relations over the neoliberal period; it is one of the most crucial aspects.

Even among younger people, the decline in employment tenure, beyond that which is easily accounted for by the longer period spent in full-time education, seems to be largely a result of the 2008-9 recession and its aftermath.

Having examined both subsidiary propositions highlighted in chapter 3, there are no grounds to believe that there has been a rise in precarity in the UK labour market during the neoliberal period according to the parsimonious definition of precarity developed in this thesis. The proposition of rising precarity is unproven. Whatever tendencies towards precarity exist in the UK context, they are confronted with powerful countertendencies that appear to hem in precarity, to contain it in certain jobs and certain spheres of the labour market.

The challenge taken up by the subsequent chapter is to explain why, in a period marked by relatively low levels of industrial action and collective workplace organisation, stable, permanent, long-term employment has remained the norm for most workers.

8 Rethinking labour markets

8.1 Introduction

Chapters 6 and 7 have presented a picture of the UK labour force at odds with the views of the theorists of transformation considered in chapter 2. Even compared to many of the more empirically grounded conceptions of contemporary employment relations covered in chapter 3, the findings are surprising.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a theoretical basis upon which these counterintuitive results can be explained. In particular, a classical Marxist framework is proposed. Such an approach offers a distinctive explanation of the relative stability of employment status and tenure in the UK over the neoliberal period.

Section 8.2 sets out the general method employed by the classical Marxist approach. In section 8.3 the concept of the mutual *interdependence* of the capitalist and working classes, and the implications of this for labour markets, is developed. It is shown that predictions of an inevitable march towards a disposable and contingent labour force are at odds with the Marxist conception of employment under capitalist conditions. Section 8.4 moves from these quite general claims about the nature of employment to a more detailed discussion of the manner in which labour markets are constituted, drawing in particular on the work of Ben Fine.

This view is further refined by adding in two other elements that help to structure and reproduce labour markets, namely gender relations (section 8.5) and the state (8.6). Section 8.7 completes the theoretical toolkit by setting out a classical Marxist approach to the category of self-employment, which, it has been noted, is particularly important in coming to terms with the gig economy.

The consequences of this approach to labour markets are considered in sections 8.8 and 8.9, which explore the implications for job tenure and status respectively, demonstrating the capacity of classical Marxism to explain the trends noted in chapters 6 and 7. Finally, there is, in section 8.10, a brief survey of some recent trends in employment in the UK, which reinforce the arguments in the chapter.

8.2 The classical Marxist approach

Classical Marxism, as defined in section 1.5, offers substantive claims about and a distinctive method of exploring labour markets. This section briefly summarises the latter.

One of the distinctive claims of classical Marxism is that by aligning itself with the standpoint of the proletariat it is possible to penetrate the misleading, fetishistic surface appearance of society (Lukács, 1974; Choonara, 2017; Marx, 1990, pp.163-177). In this sense, scientific objectivity *requires* a particular class standpoint. This does not mean neglecting empirical data in deference to a distinctive “proletarian” knowledge. *Capital*, Marx’s greatest work, is full of claims about capitalism supported by data derived from contemporary sources, almost invariably “bourgeois” sources. The point is that Marx approached the data critically, rather than absorbing it in its own terms, and attempted to ground it in theoretical propositions derived from a specific class standpoint. This scepticism towards surface appearances is captured well by Marx (1991, p.956) in the third volume of *Capital*: “[A]ll science would be superfluous if the form of appearance of things directly coincided with their essence.”

Stating that appearance and essence differ is not, in and of itself, a scientific method. To understand how the surface appearance can be penetrated, it is necessary to study the method used by Marx in the three volumes of *Capital*. Here Marx proceeds through a materialist version of the Hegelian dialectic (on Marx’s relation to Hegel with respect to these issues, see Callinicos, 2014, pp.65-158; Carchedi, 2012, pp.1-52). Central to this method are *abstraction* and the process of *rising from the abstract to the concrete*. By abstraction, Marx means setting aside complicating features of reality to grasp its driving forces in their purest and most simple form. This is precisely what Marx does in the opening chapter of *Capital*. Starting with the commodity, something evident on the surface of capitalism, he derives a series of abstract categories—*value* being among the most interesting—that play a key role in explaining more complex, concrete categories that appear later in the text. Abstract concepts are not treated simply as intellectual products, as ideas conjured out of thin air. The categories developed by Marx have a material impact on the world of capitalism, and at various point in the analysis he pauses to show the working out of these forces.

Abstraction, though, is not enough. At each stage of the analysis in *Capital* puzzles emerge forcing Marx to rise to a new, more concrete level, with greater complexity and additional complicating factors. However, again, rising to the concrete is not a self-contained intellectual process. It involves incorporating new material into theory. Famously, at the end of chapter five of *Capital*, Marx depicts a capitalist world in which products are all valued based on the quantity of abstract labour that went into producing them, and all exchange at their value on the market, asking how this system could lead to the generalised creation of profit. The following chapter, on the sale and purchase of labour-power, answers this question. Only once labour-power itself becomes a commodity can capitalist producers, who now employ wage labour, emerge, making a profit through the exploitation of workers. Up until this point in the text of *Capital*, wage

labour has not appeared at all. Marx draws on and incorporates a new concept, taken from the outside world, to push the analysis to a more concrete level. The payoff from following Marx's painstaking logic through the three volumes of *Capital* is that, as the process proceeds, it becomes possible to understand the surface appearance of capitalism, not now as a "chaotic conception of the whole", but as a "rich totality of many determinations and relations" (Marx, 1993, p.100).

The capacity of this system of relations to explain the laws of motion of capitalism is, for Marx, the key test of his theory. As he wrote to Ludwig Kugelmann, responding to a critic who complained that the first volume of *Capital* did not "prove" the law of value:

The unfortunate fellow does not see that, even if there were no chapter on "value" at all in my book, the analysis I give of the real relations would contain the proof and demonstration of the real value relation. The chatter about the need to prove the concept of value arises only from complete ignorance both of the subject under discussion and of the method of science (Marx, 2010, p.68).

Given this multi-layered conception of reality, governed by abstract drives and relations, Marx rarely suggests that the surface appearance is a direct, unmediated result of a single process. On the contrary, drawing on, but radicalising, Hegelian dialectics, Marx tends to argue in terms of tendencies and countertendencies (Carchedi, 1991, pp.3-5). The paradigmatic example is the famous "law of the tendential fall in the rate of profit" and its "counteracting tendencies", developed in part three of the third volume of *Capital* (Marx, 1991, pp.317-375). It is the concrete working out of this tendency and countertendency, mediated by a range of more concrete phenomena, rather than the algebraic sum of the two, that generates the historical movement of profit rates with the attendant crises and recoveries that accompany it (see Callinicos and Choonara, 2016; Choonara 2009, pp.74-89). An analogous approach can be taken to labour markets, as is shown in the following sections.

8.3 Class relations and two-way dependence

At the most abstract level, the Marxist approach to labour markets begins with the distinction between classes, grounded in a relation of exploitation in which capital appropriates unpaid labour-time from workers. The employment relation—the relation formed when capital hires wage labour—occurs within this context. The field of industrial relations has long recognised that the "employment relationship has two parts, market relations and managerial relations" (Edwards, 2003, p.8). Managerial relations in large firms typically involve delegation by the capitalist, who:

hands over the work of direct and constant supervision of individual workers and groups of workers to a special kind of wage-labourer. An industrial army of workers under the command of a capitalist requires, like a real army, officers (managers) and NCOs (foremen, overseers), who command during the labour process in the name of capital (Marx, 1990, p.450).

As Guglielmo Carchedi shows, based on a detailed analysis of *Capital*, a lot of what is typically viewed as the function of managers is actually one of the functions of collective labour, namely the work of “*coordination and unity of the labour process*” (Carchedi, 1977, p.63), something that would hypothetically be necessary even in a world without antagonistic social relations. However, managers also perform a second function, “the global function of capital”, which involves the work of “control and surveillance”:

Labour must be performed regularly, properly and continuously. The worker must not ill-use or damage the machines; must not waste raw materials; must not only reproduce his own labour-power but must also produce surplus-value, by working for a time longer than that contained in his wage, etc. Of particular importance is that since the quantity produced is a function of both the length of the working day and of the intensity of labour, it is necessary that the labourer works with the average degree of intensity (Carchedi, 1977, p.63).

Carchedi describes managers and supervisors as forming bureaucratic hierarchies within the firm, combining to different degrees these two functions—one necessitated by the social production of use-values by combining concrete labours, the other a despotic function necessitated by the need to appropriate surplus labour-time (see Choonara, 2017 for a detailed discussion).

However, the central category to be explored here is the other element of the employment relation—the market aspect, rather than managerial relations. Within Marxist theory, labour-power is identified as a commodity, as something with a use-value and an exchange-value. The sale and purchase of labour-power is the market side of the employment relation, operating according to a logic in which buyers and sellers meet as equal parties—“a very Eden of the innate rights of man,” as Marx (1990, p.280) puts it. Even at this high level of abstraction, Marx notes that labour-power remains a “peculiar commodity” (Marx, 1990, p.274). It is peculiar in that, unlike other commodities typical of a capitalist economy, it is produced and reproduced *outside* the capital-labour relation, generally within private households. It is, in addition, sold or, more correctly, hired only for a period of time in exchange for a wage. After labour-power is used it must renew itself and be periodically rehired by capital. Furthermore, labour-power comes attached to a human, which is imbued with its own subjectivity, to the considerable inconvenience of the capitalist.

This rich conception of the two-fold nature of the employment relation might be expected to have generated an extensive Marxist literature on labour markets, but this is not the case. There is little writing from a Marxist standpoint explicitly theorising labour markets. In the absence of a developed Marxist approach, much of the literature on this question, outside mainstream approaches, has been conducted within a framework of Keynesian labour economics, human capital theory, dual or segmented labour market theory, or from a critical realist perspective.

Ben Fine's work is an exception in its commitment to developing a distinctive Marxist labour market theory, and he has criticised rival approaches in a rare book-length treatment (Fine, 1998). Keynesian approaches tend to flounder for a number of reasons. They are dependent upon methodological individualism; they are organised around an expectation of market equilibrium; they arbitrarily divide the short and long-run in order to allow the long-run to be the "depository of ultimate equilibrium"; they arbitrarily divide variables into the exogenous and endogenous; and finally they tend to distinguish periods of history through shifts in exogenous variables, rather than embedding the labour market in a particular set of historical and social relations (Fine, 1998, pp.48-51). Human capital theories, though extremely widely used across the political spectrum, are immediately suspect from a Marxist perspective because they treat labour-power analogously with physical assets such as fixed capital. Indeed, in its neoclassical version, this means a "double reification" because capital in general is itself treated as a "physical asset, as opposed to a social relation of production" (Fine, 1998, p.58).

Segmented labour market theories seem at first more promising, having originated amid hostility from the neoclassical orthodoxy before being absorbed, in a less radical form, into the orthodoxy. However, as explained in section 2.6 above, these theories offer a range of arbitrary determinants of labour market segmentation, limiting their explanatory power.

Latterly, critical realism has asserted an attraction for those studying employment relations (see, for instance, Edwards, 2005; Fleetwood, 2011). However, the emphasis on local and specific case studies tends to de-emphasise the systemic nature of capitalism, which can only be grasped as a unified whole. Doing this involves deploying concepts such as "capital", drawn from political economy, to which critical realists seem resistant (Brown, 2014; Fine, 2007). Indeed, once all relevant concepts of this kind are incorporated into critical realism, it is unclear what advantages this approach would offer over that of classical Marxism.

Finally, labour process theory, which originated from Braverman's (1974) path-breaking study *Labor and Monopoly Capitalism*, retains at the least a lingering Marxist flavour. However, labour process theory, as the name suggests, tends to emphasise the labour

process itself, and by the 1980s, according to Paul Thompson (2010, p.8), the theory concentrated on “debates over skill and control”, losing sight of the “larger political economy picture”. By the 1990s the emphasis was on “the character of the subjective factor” in the labour process, though the underlying debate was a wider conflict between “materialists and post-modernists” (Thompson, 2010, p.8). Thompson and Smith (2009, p.923) comment on the “second wave” of labour process theory, after Braverman’s work, more generally: “In too much labour process research, distinctions about moments in political economy (exchange, production, circulation, realisation) have been lost or subordinated to a general focus on the labour process as *work organisation*.” Thompson maps out a future research agenda, including issues such as “intensification of labour”, “mobilising new sources of emotional and aesthetic labour”, “high-performance work systems”, “work-related insecurity” and “resistance around issues of emotions and newer dimensions of work” (Thompson, 2010, pp.10-11). However, there is little evidence that labour process theory in its current incarnation treats labour markets themselves as a subject for investigation, rather than a contextual factor shaping the behaviour of employers and employees.

The claim here is that a Marxist theory of the labour market can avoid these various pitfalls. Many of the alternative approaches to labour markets see the employment relationship as essentially a unidirectional one, in which labour is simply dependent on capital and in which capital has an interest in rendering labour as precarious as possible. Within the Marxist tradition, by contrast, employment relations are best conceived as relationships of mutual *interdependence* rooted in the exploitation between classes. Capital needs labour as much as labour needs capital. This leads to a more complex and contradictory relationship between capital and labour than is generally supposed in the literature, in which the relations of production limit the extent of the transformation of employment brought about by the development of the forces of production. In short, workers are in an objectively stronger position than implied by much of the writing on employment relations.

Indeed, a foundational claim of classical Marxism is that workers form a “special class” by virtue of being the only class with “the social weight and power to carry through the abolition of the old order and to build a new society” (Draper 1978, pp.33-48). This is true in the sense that the working class in advanced capitalist societies constitutes the numerical majority. More fundamentally, capitalism’s relations of production compel it not simply to create a working class but to imbue it with power due to “the strategic role of the indispensable services performed by the proletariat in keeping society going” (Draper 1978, pp.46-47).

It is this interdependence of capital and labour that distinguishes exploitation from oppression. To be oppressed on the grounds of gender or race does not imbue the

oppressed with any particular power; exploitation does. Stoppages, strikes and workplace occupations are all evidence of the working class mobilising this power. The dependence of capital on labour holds regardless of whether workers are involved in producing goods or services. Either can involve the appropriation of unpaid surplus-labour to generate surplus-value (the source of profits), a point acknowledged by Marx (1990, p.644).

Capital is dependent on labour because labour-power as a commodity offers a unique use-value, namely the capacity to create new value, which within Marxist theory is simple congealed abstract labour. However, the labour process is always of a dual nature, an act of concrete labour creating new use-values, as well as abstract, value-creating labour (Marx, 1990, pp.131-137). The concrete, determinant qualities of labour are specific to particular labour processes and the labour-power capable of providing these must be reproduced accordingly. From the point of view of maximising the appropriation of surplus-value, capital may perhaps wish to render labour-power as cheap and flexible as possible; however, this drive is in tension with the requirement to hire and retain certain *concrete forms* of labour-power, not simply labour-power in general.

As Doogan (2009, p.98) writes, “While one set of market pressures is generated by the immediate requirements of production...there is another set of reproductive imperatives that impact upon the labour market.” Changes to labour markets will reflect both pressures, rather than simply arising directly from the needs of production. Furthermore:

[I]n contrast to the irrationality engendered by neoliberal compliance with market forces, the reproductive requirements of capitalism confer a greater sense of rationality and order, demand long-term planning for current and future needs... [T]he labour market is not only an imperfect conduit through which new employment relations might be transmitted, it also acts as an insulator against the pressures for institutional changes imputed to technological development and capital mobility (Doogan, 2009, pp.112-113).

Establishment and retention of a reliable, suitably skilled supply of labour-power, along with the more prosaic desire to avoid the potential antagonisms and costs due to dismissal of employees, factor heavily in the thinking of employers. Firms devote a considerable amount of resources to dealing with labour-power issues. Some 56 percent of multi-site private sector employers have someone on their board who is an employment relations specialist, rising to 84 percent in the case of workplaces with 250 or more employees, a figure that has been fairly stable since at least the late 1990s (Wanrooy, 2013a, pp.53-54; Kersley et al, 2013, p.64). Generally the use of specialists in the human resources field, often with a professional qualification, grew during the 1990s (Guest and Bryson, 2009, pp.124-125, 148). The tendency to retain labour-power is strengthened when workers are offered more than minimal training. According to the

Workplace Employment Relations Survey, most experienced workers have had some formal training in today's labour force. Off-the-job training was offered to 80 percent or more experienced employees in 42 percent of workplaces in 2011, up from 34 percent in 2004 (Wanrooy et al, 2013b, p.36). Indeed, some recent research highlights the fact that training has proved quite resilient despite the 2008-9 recession, even if employers sometimes look for more efficient ways of delivering it (Felstead et al, 2012).

The desire to retain labour-power can lead to "labour hoarding". Holding on to labour, despite deteriorating economic conditions, was widely noted by commentators in Britain in the aftermath of the economic crisis of 2008-9 as well as during earlier slowdowns (Felices, 2003; Kaminska, 2012; Crawford et al, 2013). Just 20 percent of surviving workplaces reduced their workforce by more than a fifth between 2004 and 2011, with only 5 percent shrinking by more than half. On the other hand, 40 percent of workplaces grew by more than a fifth over the period (Wanrooy et al, 2013a, p.46). While this might be seen as a perverse market imperfection in mainstream accounts, within the classical Marxist approach tendencies to shed or hoard labour must be examined concretely as the working out of contradictory underlying pressures experienced by capital in its normal functioning.

These pressures manifest themselves in quite prosaic ways: it costs money to make employees redundant, and still more to hire and train replacements when the need arises. The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development estimated the direct costs of making employees redundant in 2008-9 as an average of £10,575 in redundancy payments. When the cost of replacing and training new staff is added, this rises to £16,375 (Philpott, 2009). To this must be added indirect costs, including disruption and the loss of goodwill among other employees, and even the potential in some cases for industrial disputes, not to mention the loss of acquired knowledge of the labour process.

One possible objection to this Marxist approach is that not all labour is value-generating, calling into question the dependence of the employer on the employee. For instance, in the financial sector, profits tend to arise from appropriation of value ultimately generated in the goods and service creating sectors. Here, though, labour-power is still essential to the appropriation of value taking place; banks or hedge funds cannot function without people conducting their operations through some determinate labour-process. More problematic are areas of the public sector such as health and education in which value is not generated (except where services have been privatised). However, provided the services offered are deemed essential to the functioning and reproduction of capitalism, in the long-run this overall dependence still holds. Reproductive and infrastructural supports for capitalism provided by the state are today woven into the fabric of capitalism. The disruption involved in shutting down publically-run transport networks, waste disposal services or schools are examples. For instance, a one-day public sector

strike in 2011 cost British industry an estimated £500 million simply by forcing parents to make alternative arrangements for their children (HM Treasury, 2011).

8.4 The structuring of labour markets

Section 8.3 considers the capital-labour relationship at a high level of abstraction, deriving some general implications for labour markets. This underlying, abstract structural relation will impinge upon and have consequences at every more concrete level of analysis. At a lower level of abstraction, it is possible to consider how labour markets are themselves structured under capitalism to better understand the different way the tendencies explored here will play out in different areas of the labour force.

Structuring is not, though, synonymous with the existence of differential outcomes. The simple fact that workers can move between jobs and sectors ensures that there will be some differentiation, for instance in terms of pay and conditions, or skills. It is necessary to distinguish when differentiation does and does not arise from structuring. Conversely, concrete examination, both theoretical and empirical, is necessary in order to determine if differences “warrant designation as a structure” and to analyse *how* a particular market is structured (Fine, 1998, pp.196-197).

For instance, on the pay differentials experienced by women relative to men, Fine (1998, pp.195-196) argues that this might reflect structuring “for those socioeconomic processes that structure women into sectoral or occupational segregation” but that other aspects of disadvantage (quite regardless of their moral repugnance):

might be better constructed as due to differences... If they did not work part-time, if they did belong to trade unions, if they did not have primary responsibility for childcare (or it was publicly provided), if there were effective comparable worth legislation, then much of the apparent “structural” differentiation between men and women would be eroded.

Similarly, the workers who are in unionised workplaces in a given sector of the economy, who might, therefore, receive a higher wage, are differentiated from their non-unionised counterparts without belonging to a different labour market structure.

Conversely, outcomes can be quite similar even in the presence of quite distinctive processes through which careers are structured, as in the case of doctors and lawyers, who have historically been relatively insulated from wider labour markets by highly defined barriers to their professions (Fine, 1998, pp.194, 196).

Differentiation by, say, gender or skill is generic across the labour force as a whole, but structures exist within particular labour markets, reflecting how they are created,

reproduced and transformed historically. In other words, labour market structures reflect how deeper socioeconomic relations are historically embedded in particular labour markets. A similar distinction appears in work by Doogan (2009, p.97) between “deep structure” and “surface structure” of labour markets, with the former reflecting “the foundational character of relations between capital, labour and the state”. This structuring will in turn have implications for the use of non-standard forms of employment and differences in employment tenure. This helps to explain significant sectoral variations in “security and flexibility” observed across even as narrow a section of the globe as the European Union in other studies (for instance, Holman and McClelland, 2011).

Ben Fine’s work adds to this a detailed account of how structuring and differentiation of labour markets can each be identified and theorised, as elaborated by the following subsection.

8.4.1 Ben Fine and the structured labour market

The reproduction of labour-power, taking place outside the capital-labour relationship, involves the creation of particular systems of provision and consumption, which “vary not only with income but also with a range of other socioeconomic variables such as age, region, household composition, etc” (Fine, 1998, p.181; see Saad-Filho, 2000, pp.210-212, for a summary of the “systems of provision” approach). The “shifting differentiation in consumption can lead to differentiation of wages as these are consolidated within the labour market”. This approach is different to most orthodox and even some Marxist approaches in that it refuses to “view difference in consumption as the simple outcome of differences in money rewards as previously determined by labour market outcomes”. Instead, “different items of consumption...enter to a greater or lesser extent into the consumption patterns of the various sections of the workforce, and this will be reflected in pay and other differentials in conditions of work”. The different consumption norms depicted here can, in turn, be linked to “race, gender and other socioeconomic characteristics” (Fine, 1998, pp.185, 182). At the same time, there can be countertendencies at work in which high levels of horizontal mobility, for instance, among very highly skilled or very low skilled workers, tends to erode differences in consumption norms (Fine, 1998, p.197). Different outcomes in terms of wages cannot be understood without reference to this complex and evolving picture of differentiated consumption norms across the labour force.

Alongside this “supply side” structuring of the labour market, there is also a distinctive Marxist analysis of the “demand side”. Here, rather than relying on the ad hoc approach of segmented labour market theory, differences that emerge are developed on the basis of

an understanding of the way that capital and labour are separated in class terms but drawn together in the process of production. Across an economy there will both be a distribution of labour between sectors, reflecting the social division of labour, and particular divisions of labour within workplaces. As Fine argues, “the interaction between these two forms of division of labour is both complex and indeterminate and not reducible by a technological imperative alone to the nature of the tasks themselves”. For instance, vertical integration and disintegration may coexist, as rival firms seek to “guarantee markets up or downstream” or seek to reduce their capital requirement and “exert competitive pressure on fragmented suppliers”. Within firms themselves, there can be competing imperatives towards specialisation of labour or towards generalisation in which workers undertake a wider range of tasks. Mechanisation and automation may interact with these tendencies, further differentiating the workforce. Finally, in consequence of the formation of the “collective labourer” characteristic of large-scale production, workers “belong to more or less closely and permanent linked groups rather than serving as free floating individuals” (Fine, 1998, pp.177-179).

In addition to these considerations, it is important to extend the factors structuring the labour market beyond the narrowly economic. The process of “social reproduction encompasses a wide range of factors...such as sexism, racism, trade unionism, etc,” each interacting with economic reproduction in particular ways to generate labour markets (Fine, 1998, pp.108, 192-193).

Fine’s (1998, p.5) crucial conclusion is:

[L]abour markets are different from one another, not only in outcomes in the sense of rewards in the form of wages, conditions and careers, but also in the way in which they are structured and reproduced. There is no single labour market, although labour markets are intimately connected to one another, and no single generally applicable labour market theory. Whilst it is possible to identify appropriate abstract analytical principles, how they apply will differ across labour markets. This simple, even elementary insight appears to have been implicitly rejected by the vast majority of the literature.

Here differentiation and structure are not simply indicated by different independent variables that lead to different wage levels as in orthodox approaches to labour markets. On the contrary, differences produced by various factors “can only be taken as evidence of labour market structuring once the way in which the labour market structures are shown to function and to be reproduced” (Fine, 1998, p.196).

Several important conclusions for the study of precarity follow from this. First, it is highly unlikely that precarity constitutes a structure demarcating a particular segment of the labour force in the manner suggested by dual labour market theory approaches discussed

in section 2.6. Second, there may be differences in degree of precarity, reflected in tenure or job status, across the labour force as a whole. Third, the deep structure of labour markets will entrench certain differences in the prevalence of precarity in particular areas of the labour force—but while this implies the existence of pockets of precarity, because these tendencies are bound up with structures particular to specific labour markets they will not automatically generalised across the labour force as a whole.

8.4.2 The reserve army and the lumpenproletariat

There have been recent attempts to assimilate the notion of contemporary precarity into Marx's own discussion of what he calls the "industrial reserve army" (see, for instance, Jonna and Foster, 2016). This reserve army, in Marx's account, is created by the process of automation, which expels, in relative terms, workers from production:

[I]f a surplus population of workers is a necessary product of accumulation...this surplus population also becomes, conversely, the lever of capitalist accumulation... It forms an industrial reserve army, which belongs to capital just as absolutely as if the latter had bred it at its own cost (Marx, 1990, p.784).

This gives great flexibility to capitalist production. It allows it to create a workforce to exploit in new areas of industry or to cope with the rapid expansion of the system when it is booming. In addition, the unemployed put pressure on employed workers, placing limits on their demands for greater wages and for better conditions, especially at times when the economy is weakening and unemployment rising.

The unemployed are not, in Marx's account, a single homogenous mass. In *Capital* he distinguishes between three layers in the reserve army: the "floating", the "latent" and the "stagnant". The floating layer are found in the "centres of modern industry—factories, workshops, ironworks, mines, etc". Here "labourers are sometimes repelled, sometimes attracted" and as capital accumulation proceeds, workers must migrate to new branches of industry. They form a core part of the working class, even if they are temporarily cast out of work. The latent layer consists of pools of people potentially available to exploit who are drawn from the countryside as capital takes control over agriculture, expelling part of the labour force. The third layer, the stagnant, consists of those "with extremely irregular employment", making it the "broad foundation for special branches of capitalist exploitation". Below these groups, sit those who dwell "in the sphere of pauperism" but are capable of work, along with "orphans and pauper children" who might be candidates for the industrial reserve army, and, finally, the "demoralised and ragged, and those unable to work", perhaps through old age, mutilation and so on (Marx, 1990, pp.794-797).

However, this description cannot be uncritically applied to advanced capitalist economies, and the temptation, for instance, to treat the stagnant layer in Marx's account as analogous with a contemporary precariat should be resisted. Today some form, however limited, of welfare state has replaced the workhouses of Victorian Britain. Rural areas of the UK are no longer a repository of potential labourers—though migration from other countries may, in some cases, still play an analogous role. More generally, the state both creates and intervenes in labour markets to a greater extent than in Marx's day, as discussed in section 8.6 below.

The degree to which labour shedding takes place due to the rising organic composition of capital may also be more muted in areas of the economy that are less easily automated—as is the case with some jobs in the public sector and labour-intensive areas of the service sector. This raises another important qualification to much of the literature on labour markets: emphasis on cyclical patterns can result in longer-term transformations of employment being overlooked. For instance, the recessions of the early 1980s and 1990s resulted in the destruction of considerable portions of manufacturing industry in the UK through plant closure or firm failure; it is less likely that whole hospitals or universities will shut down. By the 2008-9 recession, manufacturing represented a comparatively smaller proportion of the UK labour force. As Gregg and Wadsworth (2010) point out, there is evidence of a differential impact of recessions on industries with different levels of capital intensity and productivity. Manufacturing employment tends to take the largest hit, followed by areas of the service sector with relatively high levels of capital intensity, with those sections of the public sector that have experienced limited automation lagging behind. In addition, the pattern of direct state and central bank intervention can alter the propensity for firm failure. For example, the monetary interventions in the wake of the 2008-9 recession, in particular low interest rates and quantitative easing, may have contributed to the perpetuation of “zombie firms”, which continue to function by rolling over debts without investing or making significant profits. According to one recent estimate, such firms may be responsible for 7.5 percent of capital invested in the UK economy (McGowan et al, 2017).

That is not to say that Marx's method lacks all relevance. Some of the shifts in the use of non-standard work do follow from changes to the pace of accumulation, as was noted in chapter 6. For instance, in the period immediately after crises, a disproportionate number of people, and particularly new entrants into the labour market, may be integrated as involuntary temporary workers. However, these do not necessarily constitute a fixed group, a stagnant layer, doomed to live in permanent precarity, and many are later integrated on a more stable basis.

Unfortunately, Jonna and Foster (2016) do not apply such a nuanced approach. In their discussion of the US economy they assert that “the quality of employment has declined

dramatically, with many more workers in low-paid sectors and part-time, temporary, and contingent jobs. All of this means that the precariousness of the workforce, and the downward pull of the reserve army on labour as a whole, is growing.” However, no evidence specific to the US economy is offered. Instead they offer a series of sweeping generalities about the global labour force, viewing the problem of precarity as essentially the problem of a “global reserve army...of more than 2.3 billion people”, who presumably form the latent layer of the reserve army. The “active labour army”, they claim, consists of just 1.66 billion, many of whom are also “precariously employed”. They add that 1.5 billion workers are “vulnerably employed”, a concept they link to Marx’s “stagnant layer”. These generalisations offer very little by way of a concrete analysis of the tensions and contradictions between mutual dependence and precarity as they actually operate in advanced capitalist societies.

Another author, Standing (2011) glosses his precariat as the “new dangerous class”, echoing Marx’s description of what he calls the *lumpenproletariat* in the section of *Capital* dealing with the industrial reserve army. However, this is an extremely strained analogy. Marx’s (1990, p.797) *lumpenproletariat*, which consists of groups such as “vagabonds, criminals and prostitutes”, is distinguished in *Capital* from even the lowest layers of the reserve army of labour and, unlike the latter, stands outside the working class. Hal Draper (1978, pp.453-478) offers a detailed textual analysis of Marx’s scattered comments on the *lumpenproletariat*, showing convincingly that the term is best seen as a catch-all for those people, whatever their class origin, who are incapable of adapting to the capitalist social structure, who occupy a parasitic existence and therefore turn to forms of petty criminality. Attempting to identify a section of the labour force with this group is quite simply a category error.

8.5 Gender and the reproduction of labour-power

The discussion of labour markets presupposes the existence and reproduction of labour-power, which takes place outside the direct auspices of the capital-labour process, and the way this takes place has wider implications for the functioning of labour markets. As Marx (1994, p.412) notes:

The worker must in reality preserve his labour capacity through his means of subsistence, but this private consumption of his, which is at the same time the reproduction of his labour capacity, falls outside the commodity’s production process.

Wage labourers are neither produced through a directly capitalist process, as robots are, nor are they today commonly bred in captivity as slaves. Gender is an important aspect of the process of reproduction of labour-power because it tends to take place in the context

of the gendered capitalist family. The best theoretical starting point for understanding this aspect of capitalism is provided by Lise Vogel in her work *Marxism and the Oppression of Women*. Vogel focuses on the nature of women's oppression but not on the basis of seeking to identify separate sources of this oppression, a so-called "dual-system perspective". Instead she develops what she calls a "social reproduction perspective", concentrating on "women's differential location within social reproduction as a whole" (Vogel, 2013, p.134). Vogel distinguishes between productive consumption, which takes place routinely in capitalist production as commodities are used up in the generation of new commodities, and individual consumption that reproduces workers themselves. It is not enough, though, simply to reproduce particular individuals. Reproduction must extend to the creation of the next generation of labourers, and here "biological reproduction must intervene":

[I]t must be admitted, human beings do not reproduce themselves by parthenogenesis. Women and men are different... Pregnancy and lactation involve, at the minimum, several months of somewhat reduced capacity to work. Even when a woman continues to participate in surplus production, childbearing therefore interferes to some extent with the immediate appropriation of surplus-labour, and pregnancy and lactation may lessen a woman's capacity in this area as well. From the ruling class's short-term point of view, then, childbearing potentially entails a costly decline in the mother's capacity to work, while at the same time requiring that she be maintained during the period of diminished contribution... At the same time, child-bearing is of benefit to the ruling class, for it must occur if the labour force is to be replenished through generational replacement (Vogel, 2013, pp.146, 151).

The result is, again, a set of contradictory tendencies: "From the point of view of the dominant class, there is, therefore, a potential contradiction between its immediate need to appropriate surplus-labour and its long-term requirement for a class to perform it" (Vogel, 2013, p.151).

The process of gender differentiation becomes embedded in particular social structures known as the family, and these structures give rise to broader inequalities, with women being pushed to take on particular functions involving the raising of children and the maintenance of labour-power in the household, and with men's labour elevated to a higher status.

Thus far, the argument might apply to class societies in general (but not pre-class societies; see Leacock, 1972; Harman, 1994). Vogel sets out how the reproduction of labour-power is structured under a specifically capitalist society, giving rise to particular kinds of family. Whereas in many pre-capitalist societies the reproduction of

labour-power was integrated with productive activities, with the household functioning as a producing unit as well as a site of consumption, it was under capitalism that society was sharply sundered into an “arena in which surplus-labour is performed” and “a sphere that can properly be called domestic” (Vogel, 2013, p.152). As Vogel (2013, p.159) writes, “wages may enable a worker to purchase commodities, but additional labour—domestic labour—must generally be performed before they are consumed. In addition, many of the labour-processes associated with the generational replacement of labour-power are carried out as part of domestic labour”. Domestic labour, precisely because it is not performed directly under capitalist social relations, does not generate value (Vogel, 2013, p.23; for another perspective on the domestic labour debate, see Fine, 1992, pp.169-191). Indeed, there is a sharpening opposition between wage labour and domestic labour:

Capitalism’s drive to increase surplus-value by enhancing productivity, especially through industrialisation, forces a severe spatial, temporal, and institutional separation between domestic labour and the capitalist production process. Capitalists must organise production so that more and more of it is under their direct control in workshops and factories, where wage labour is performed for specified amounts of time. Wage labour comes to have a character that is wholly distinct from the labourer’s life away from the job... [T]he separation of wage labour from domestic labour and the payment of wages...are materialised in the development of specialised sites and social units for the performance of domestic labour (Vogel, 2013, p.159).

Capitalism, especially in periods of expansion, will often seek to harness the greatest possible mass of labour-power. But at other times the concern of capitalists to generate the next generation of workers might lead them, or at least the more far-sighted elements of the class, often including some of those running the state, to seek to bolster the family to secure their long-term interests. The concrete working out of these contradictory pressures has to be considered historically and empirically (for similar approaches, independently developed by other writers, see, for instance, Harman, 1984; Fraser, 2016). Two coordinated changes in contemporary capitalism are especially relevant. First, in societies such as the UK there has been a growth of participation of women—in particular those with partners and children—in the labour force since the Second World War. This has been permitted, first, by the provision of a range of goods and services, now produced as capitalist commodities, that have allowed the time spent on labour in the household to decline (Walby, 1999, p.201; Fine, 1992, p.111). Second, some of the processes of social reproduction are today undertaken by the state, through the provision of public healthcare and education systems for example (for brief accounts of the changes see Brenner and Ramas, 1984, pp.59-63; McGregor, 2013). These changes open up the possibility of drawing women into the labour force in increasing numbers as well as

making households increasingly dependent on a dual income (Bradley et al, 2000, p.76). The implications of these changes for the study of precarity are considered below.

8.6 The role of the state

In capitalist societies, and especially advanced capitalist societies, the state plays a crucial role in creating, reproducing and shaping labour markets. This has long been recognised by the classical Marxist perspective as well as by authors such as Polanyi (2001). Consider the crucial role played by factory legislation in regulating the working day in Britain, famously described by Marx (1990, pp.340-416) in chapter ten of the first volume of *Capital*. The legislation emerged out of a complex three-way struggle involving “rapacious” capitalists, eager to maximise their exploitation of workers, more far-sighted sections of the ruling class who foresaw the erosion of the capacity of the labour force to reproduce itself and workers themselves who mounted their own struggle for legal restrictions on their exploitation. Marx writes:

Apart from the daily more threatening advance of the working class movement, the limiting of factory labour was dictated by the same necessity as forced the manuring of English fields with guano. The same blind desire for profit that in the one case exhausted the soil had in the other case seized hold of the vital force of the nation at its roots (Marx, 1990, p.348).

Marx adds some evidence that the rise of industrial capitalism was destroying the basis for exploiting labour-power. He writes of periodic epidemics and the general decline of the height of men and their fitness for military service across Europe in the period of industrialisation. By the 1860s half of French conscripts were being rejected because of short stature or bodily weakness. Marx (1990, pp.610-635) also points out that once laws restricting the working day were established for the factories, they were extended to other sweated industries. This ensured that the latter would in some cases become economically unviable or, in other cases, that they would have to play by the same rules of the game as the factories that formed the heart of the Industrial Revolution. This provided an impetus for the generalisation of the factory system and the techniques it had pioneered across wider areas of the economy. The “procedural role” of the state, in defining “rules of the game”, enforcing the legal status of contracts, and preforming “mediation functions”, continues in the present era (Meardi et al, 2016, p.564). Indeed, in the neoliberal period the role of the state in the sphere of employment relations has grown (Howell, 2016).

This role for the state in labour markets does not imply that it is a neutral body standing above and adjudicating over class conflict. On the contrary, from a Marxist perspective the

state is best seen as a “historical necessity emerging from the development of the class struggle, for a collective instrument of class domination...it has developed historically out of the class struggle” (Clarke, 1991, p.188). However, as demonstrated above, the capitalist interests embedded in the state can themselves be contradictory. Furthermore, as Clarke (1991, p.197) points out, the lack of capitalist homogeneity means it would be impossible for the state to reflect the interest of capital in general in any simplistic sense. For instance, the need to educate workers clashes with the drive to minimise the amount of surplus-value absorbed via taxation. In addition to these tensions, the level of class struggle, and the degree to which the state seeks to incorporate, and thereby defuse, the aspirations of workers, imposes further limits on the functioning of the state (Clarke, 1991, pp.198-200). Different governments may also adopt differing approaches to trade union demands, either attempting to curtail union rights or to domesticate unions by incorporating some of their demands, and this factor is reinforced once universal adult suffrage is introduced. These contradictory pressures and drives suggest that, while the state can be a force engendering greater fluidity or flexibility of employment relations (Howell, 2016, pp.580-585), it can also operate as a countervailing force. So a recent article highlighting demands for flexibility also notes:

Minimum employment standards have also been enhanced in many areas... For example, all OECD countries, except the USA, now have mandatory paid annual and public holidays and most...have a form of statutory minimum wage... Employment protection has been crucial in enhancing dismissal protection of permanent employees... However, new forms of employment protection have also been applied to casual, seasonal and agency workers (Rasmussen et al, 2016, p.889).

The growth of employment legislation in the recent period is in contrast with the situation for much of the 20th century when in the UK collective bargaining between employers and unions instead played a central role. The heyday of this “voluntarism” was the 1950s. Statutory redundancy payments, one of the elements, as noted above, making it a costly business to dispense with employees, were only introduced in 1965, in part in order to moderate union demands for job security by softening the impact of redundancy on workers (Root, 1987, p.18; Welch, 2012). In this sense, they can be seen as a form in which the historic strength and militancy of workers has been embedded, in a more individualised manner, in the legal system.

The 1970s saw a whole raft of legislation related to industrial relations, and over issues such as health and safety (particularly the 1974 act). Dickens and Hall (2010, p.300) argue:

[While] the 1970s saw an increase in the *extent* of legal regulation, it was the *nature* of the employment law reforms introduced by Conservative governments between 1979 and 1997 which constituted

a decisive shift away from the longstanding view that collective bargaining was the best way of conducting industrial relations.

This primarily involved seeking to undermine the unions in general and collective bargaining specifically, thereby rendering labour more flexible by removing a perceived obstacle to the operation of the laws of the market (Welch, 2012; Smith, 2015). At the same time, membership of the European Union and its predecessors required certain regulations in the UK, in conformity with other states across the common market, reflecting in part continental traditions that embed a greater degree of legal controls on employment. Inasmuch as new rights were introduced under the Thatcher-Major governments there was a shift towards *individual* rights, giving little role to collective agency or to trade unions; hence the emphasis on industrial tribunals, later employment tribunals, to achieve redress for employees whose rights had been infringed. At the same time, from the mid-1980s greater efforts were made to force claimants off welfare and into work, initially through restrictions on benefits and increasingly with elements of workfare, particularly targeting the young (Peck, 2001, pp.266-273).

By the time of the election of the Labour government in 1997, “the debate was no longer about *whether* the law should play a role in British industrial relations but about *what* role it should play” (Dickens and Hall, 2010, p.301). The Labour programme involved, in its own words, a commitment to “the fair treatment of employees within a flexible and efficient labour market” (Department for Trade and Industry, cited in Dickens and Hall, 2006, p.339). Notably, most of the changes introduced were justified by the incoming government through pro-business arguments, and reflected a range of electoral considerations and ideological commitments (Smith, 2015). The changes added to an already substantial body of employment law, which was now overwhelmingly centred on the individual rights of employees, and with the rights of employers in relation to individual employees. Prior to 1997, Dickens and Hall (2010, p.304) note the following statutory rights:

[A] minimum period of notice of termination; a statement of the principal terms and conditions of the contract of employment and of discipline and dismissal procedures; an itemised pay statement; a statement of the reason for dismissal; protection against unfair dismissal; protection against discrimination on grounds of race, sex and disability; time off work for antenatal care; maternity leave and pay; return to work after leave for childbirth; time off work for various public and trade union duties; equal pay and other contractual terms as between men and women; redundancy payments; protection against dismissal or action short of dismissal on grounds of trade union membership, non-membership or union activity; and preservation of acquired rights on the transfer of undertakings.

Added to these after 1997 were:

[T]he national minimum wage...; protection against dismissal or detriment for “whistleblowing”; the right to be accompanied in grievance and disciplinary hearings; statutory limits on working time; paid annual leave; parental leave; time off for family emergencies; the right to request flexible working; paternity leave and pay; adoption leave and pay; equal treatment for part-time workers; protection for fixed-term employees; and protection against discrimination on grounds of age, religion or belief and sexual orientation (Dickens and Hall, 2010, p.304).

This enormous growth of legislation throughout the neoliberal period is not the product of altruism towards workers. Because the emphasis here is on individual rights rather than collective rights, the legislation can be regarded, in part, as an attempt to contain and thus undermine collective class struggle. This is reinforced by the considerable restrictions placed on the rights of trade unions to organise and take industrial action since the 1970s (see Pyper, 2017 for a comprehensive summary of trade union legislation from 1979-2010; on the subsequent Trade Union Act, first introduced in 2015, see Ford and Novitz, 2015). Furthermore “active labour-market” policies restructuring and limiting access to welfare for those not in work, together with at least some aspects of workfarism adopted from the US became the political consensus for mainstream parties from the period of the election of Tony Blair’s Labour government in 1997 to the rise of Jeremy Corbyn as Labour leader in 2015 (Peck, 2001, p.278; Daguerre and Etherington, 2014, pp.23-43).

In some regards recent governments have sought to render capital more competitive by attacking previously existing employment rights. Under the Conservative and Liberal Democrat coalition (2010-15), the costs for bringing “time wasting claims” at employment tribunals were increased from £10,000 to £20,000, and for “the first time in their 50 years existence, tribunals now charge fees for the presentation of any type of tribunal claim and a further fee if a claim goes to full hearing”. For instance, “claiming unfair dismissal...may cost a claimant £1,180” (Welch, 2016, p.96). However, here again the contradictions were revealed with a recent the Supreme Court ruling that the government was acting unlawfully in introducing the fees (SC, 2017). To take another example, the period of qualification for unfair dismissal has tended to vary historically, showing how the different contradictory pressures play out. Conservative governments increased it from six months to one year in 1979 and from one to two years in 1985; Labour reduced it to one year in 1999 before the coalition government again extended it to two years (Smith, 2015). Some of the legislation that strengthens employee rights can in fact increase employer flexibility. For instance, Mark Bell (2011) argues that one of the functions of the legislation to end discrimination against part-time workers was to promote this form of

work, leading to more flexible working hours for employees. Furthermore, in some areas the public sector, in which the state has the greatest influence over employment relations, the “new public management” pioneered use of temporary work and other non-standard forms of employment on a greater scale than in the private sector (Conley, 2002; Kirkpatrick and Hoque, 2006).

However, the state cannot be seen in this analysis as simply a force engendering greater precarity. It is the key institution that, at times, seeks to provide greater stability by intervening in labour markets in accordance with the long-term needs of capital.

8.7 Varieties of self-employment

One final concept requires elaboration in order to understand the working of labour markets and that is the concept of self-employment, in which, ostensibly, rather than labour power being sold, the worker sells instead the commodity (be it a good or service) they have produced. However, in practice self-employment is simply a legal category—and not a particularly clearly defined one—which encompasses a diverse range of work situations: wealthy consultants who work on their own account by choice, hairdressers operating from their own homes or taxi drivers designated as self-employed to weaken employment protections or to derive tax advantages for employers.

The Marxist method is to look behind formal categories and seek to identify the relations of production that underpin them. The key concept here is that of the petty bourgeoisie. This group contrasts with the “new middle class”, which, as noted above, is centred on bureaucratic hierarchies of managers and supervisors performing a contradictory combination of functions generally attributed to labour and capital (Choonara, 2017). The petty bourgeoisie, unlike the “new middle class”, forms a distinctive class group with a determinate position relative to capital and to the appropriation of labour-time. Indeed, this class pre-dates the emergence of capitalism. However, under capitalism, it is subordinated to the logic of that system. As Marx (1993, pp.106-107) puts it:

In all forms of society there is one specific kind of production which predominates over the rest, whose relations thus assign rank and influence to the others. It is a general illumination which bathes all the other colours and modifies their particularity.

For the petty bourgeoisie, this involves the incorporations of two social classes in the same subject. The petty bourgeois individual is “cut up into two persons” (Marx, 1978b, p.408). In *Capital* he writes that even

those kinds of labour which have not been subjugated by capital in reality are so in thought. For example, the self-employing worker is his

own wage labourer; his own means of production appear to him in his own mind as capital. As his own capitalist he puts himself to work as wage-labourer (Marx, 1990, p.1042).

The petty bourgeois business owner must necessarily play the role of both exploiter and exploited. They both reward themselves a wage and appropriate their own surplus labour-time as profit, and they feel the pressure to maximise their profitability through the process of capitalist competition. This combination of classes in a single personage means that the petty bourgeoisie begin to shade into the capitalist class proper once they employ wage labour in their own right and as this becomes a more important source of surplus-value than self-exploitation. More importantly for the present discussion, where the petty bourgeoisie possess little or no capital of their own, and must seek access to the means of production via a capitalist, allowing the capitalist to appropriate labour-time from them, they begin to merge into the working class.

Moreover, the situation is a dynamic one. In his account of the development of capitalism in Russia, Lenin describes how Russian agriculture developed a differentiation between big, small and middle peasants (peasants and small-scale farmers being, then as now, the most numerous element of the petty bourgeoisie globally). The process depended on the capacity of peasants to accumulate capital. The big peasants could expand production and begin to hire labour-power, tending to become capitalist farmers; the middling peasants could just about reproduce themselves and survive as a class of small-scale commodity producers; the small peasants risked losing their capacity to reproduce themselves and faced a future as agricultural labourers (Lenin, 1960, pp.176-181). This example is also a reminder that the petty bourgeoisie does not necessarily possess greater wealth or income than the proletariat. Even when it does, it can risk being cast down into the working class proper.

Within this approach, the legal and statistical category of self-employment conceals a complex array of possible class relations. As noted in section 3.5.5, studies have shown widespread false self-employment in areas as diverse as construction and stripping. Such groups do indeed blend into the working class. This category is particularly relevant for those classified as low-skilled *and* who rely on selling their services to a single company. For instance, Annette Thörnquist (2015), surveying the Swedish situation, focuses on construction, road haulage and cleaning as instances in which false self-employment is widely used.

However, as chapter 6 suggests, there are lots of others in the category of self-employment who should be understood as part of the petty bourgeoisie, typically selling their services or products to consumers (who may themselves be capitalists), rather than, in a more-or-less disguised form, selling their labour-power for a wage. Again, there are pros and cons from a capitalist perspective of using false self-employment. Employers

have to juggle the advantages of having a regular, relatively content labour force, wherein certain forms of expertise can be retained, against the tax advantages and flexibility afforded by self-employment.

Not only are the imperatives for capital contradictory, but, again, the state may take a dim view of false self-employment. As Thörnquist (2015, p.421) points out:

The expansion of the grey area [between employment and self-employment] is a problem not only for trade unions and workers, but also for law-abiding employers and the state, as it involves unfair competition, market disturbances and tax evasion.

Here, in addition to the aim of the state to secure a level playing field for competition through regulation of the labour market, there is also the economic imperative of state managers to ensure the collection of tax revenue. One reason for the decline in the male self-employment figures in the late 1990s is that in 1996 a UK “Inland Revenue initiative led many self-employed workers, predominantly in the construction industry to become employees” (ONS, 2014).

One example that has a disproportionately high profile in discussions of the “gig economy” is the taxi service provided by Uber. Its profile is disproportionate because Uber drivers make up a small section of the labour force, estimated at 25,000 in London in 2015 out of a labour force approaching five million. In addition, rather than introducing an entirely novel form of work, it tends to collect under its umbrella workers who previously would have been employed driving black cabs or in any one of the approximately 3,000 licensed private hire firms (Knight, 2016). If anything, the “collectivisation” of Uber makes it a more prominent target for organisation for unions. A tribunal case taken out by two drivers in October 2016 found that the drivers ought to be classified as “workers”, as defined by the 1996 Employment Rights Act. Judges in the case accused Uber of “resorting in its documentation to fictions, twisted language and even brand new terminology”, adding: “The notion that Uber in London is a mosaic of 30,000 small businesses linked by a common ‘platform’ is to our minds faintly ridiculous... Drivers do not and cannot negotiate with passengers... They are offered and accept trips strictly on Uber’s terms” (cited in Osborne, 2016). Although the case does not set a precedent, a pending appeal against the ruling, if it went against Uber, would do so.

The variety of forms of self-employment and the contradictory pressures at work on employers using these arrangements demonstrate why generalisation from models such as Uber’s, which represent small areas of the labour force, is problematic. However, such generalisation is common. One recent article proclaimed the “Uber-all Economy of the Future”, arguing, “Every nook and cranny of the consumer economy is being ‘Uberized’ by a business model that twins services with technology” (Smith, 2016, p.383). The

perspective of the article is one of Promethean technological determinism. It is as if mere existence of “productivity-enhancing technologies”, consumer demand and competition will reconfigure production entirely, without any concern for the retention of skills or experience among employees or the regulation of labour markets. In this vision, “There may be more or less jobs, but the jobs available will be either jobs running technology or jobs selling personal services.” Changes to technology will seamlessly “spill over into regulatory policy” (Smith, 2016, p.389).

A more serious study of self-employed personal trainers in the UK offers a useful account of conditions in this industry, conditions the authors dub “neo-villeiny” (Harvey et al, 2017). The use of the term *villeiny* suggests that workers are bound to their “employer” by virtue of their need to access the latter’s means of production. In this case access to gyms and related equipment, and the clients who use them, are crucial for the personal trainers. According to the authors, this allows the gyms to achieve flexibility while retaining a level of commitment (or at least dependence) from the trainers. The term neo-villeiny though is misleading, as dependence on employers for access to the means of production is the general condition of workers under capitalism. The situation depicted is closer to one of false self-employment. Furthermore, the (effective) employer remains dependent on the workers. The latter can opt for either waged employment or self-employment. The interviewees chose the latter because they preferred the flexibility offered or because they saw an opportunity to increase their income. Presumably they could seek to move back to waged employment at their gym or seek a job at another—assuming they were not in a position to seek an alternative form of employment altogether. The analogy with feudal serfs, bound to the land, seems strained, to say the least. The most problematic aspect of the article, though, is the claim that “neo-villeiny is certainly feasible across the service industry” (Harvey et al, 2017, p.31). It is not clear why this is the case. Would, for instance, the owners of a chain of supermarkets allow core staff to choose if and when to provide services to customers?

As with employment de-standardisation more generally, the use of self-employment in this manner is subject to constraints and is hemmed in by more traditional forms of employment that have, for perfectly rational reasons, become entrenched in the labour force. This explains why, though there has been some rise in self-employment generally since 2001, chapter 6 found relatively little evidence of a growth on a large scale of work that could be identified with the gig economy.

8.8 Implications for tenure

The analysis here has clear implications for the evolution of job tenure. In contrast with the views of the theorists of transformation, the neoliberal period does not open up a

phase in capitalism's development in which there is a single uniform tendency towards more contingent employment relations. There are instead contradictory tendencies at work, which operate in concrete, historically determined ways to generate patterns of job tenure.

For the period considered in the UK, the costs to employers of ridding themselves of employees, and potentially replacing them at some point in the future, often outweigh the benefits of such numerical flexibility. This is the case despite relatively low and declining levels of trade union organisation and industrial action within the workplace. The employment tenure figures remain throughout the neoliberal period dominated by voluntary quits rather than involuntary redundancy. This explains both the counter-cyclical pattern of tenure through the business cycle and the relative long-term stability of mean tenure. As noted in section 8.4.2 this is reinforced by long-term changes to the UK economy, in particular the relative decline in manufacturing employment. Because job shedding is less likely in the public sector or sections of the service sector with relatively low capital intensity, it is far more likely that workers in these areas will experience long-term employment.

One question posed by this pattern is whether this stability of the labour market in the UK should be welcomed. While those radical left figures discussed in chapter 2 tend to see instability as a problem for workers, this is, in fact, to take a rather narrow view. From the worker's standpoint, the ability to move between jobs can be a positive factor, characteristic of periods of high employment and high levels of employee confidence. Stability might be welcomed by workers, if they feel that there are few better jobs out there, but it might equally be that people are finding themselves caught in jobs they dislike for longer periods of time. That being the case, those who identify with the working class movement ought to focus a good deal of their attention on the quality of and remuneration for the work available, and how these are changing over time, rather than simply on precarity and insecurity.

It has been noted in chapter 7 that, along with a decline in male tenure, there is an increase in female tenure across the period studied. This again is easily understood in the light of the theoretical approach outlined here. The changes to the family and the household noted in section 8.5 have allowed capital in the post-war UK economy to draw women into the labour force to a far greater extent than was previously the case—and with greater stability. This trend has continued through the neoliberal period. As this has taken place, there has been some convergence between employment conditions for men and for women. This has often been demanded by women workers themselves, and, less consistently but increasingly, by unions and the organisations of the left. However, access to a stable female section of the labour force also offers advantages to employers,

provided it does not endanger the long-term reproduction of labour-power more generally.

The relative convergence between male and female employees takes place in the context of gender relations that remain inegalitarian, in which women still bear disproportionate responsibility for childcare and domestic work. One consequence of this has been the widespread use of part-time employment among women, which is, as has been shown, increasingly stable, long-term employment. Another aspect of the gendered dimension to employment relations has been the introduction of legislation that secures certain maternity rights, notably the right to return to prior employment after maternity leave. This state intervention reflects the tendency of capital to try to secure stable employment relations in such a way that individual capitalists are not penalised for offering superior conditions to retain their women employees.

Along with the differences between genders, there are noticeable differences between sectors and occupations. This reflects the deeper level of structuring of labour markets discussed above. In fact, sectors and occupations are too broad, as categories, to do justice to this structuring; the framework provided by Fine implies that a more focused study of tenure among narrower groups in the labour market would be required, something that is not possible using the existing aggregate data due to the small sample sizes when the data is broken down in this way. Nonetheless, to a degree even the broad categories considered in chapter 7 tend to group together particular labour markets with certain shared characteristics. Hence the sustained differences in tenure between sectoral and occupational groups.

Although young people are consistently viewed as precarious, the data on tenure does not show a dramatic shift for younger age groups. This is particularly true if the longer period that young people tend to spend in education is taken into account. This, too, is a reflection of the changing requirements of capital. As Marx (1990, pp.617-619) notes, alongside the tendency to deskilling labour by breaking up and automating complex tasks, capital, forcing labourers to move between jobs “necessitates variations of labour, fluidity of functions, and the mobility of the worker”. He identifies the attempt to inculcate new and often more generalisable skills with the foundation of “technical and agricultural schools” and French “vocational schools”; today we can think of the university education that large numbers of those joining the labour force now possess. In this sense, the counterpart to deskilling is precisely to reconfigure the pools of labour-power available to capital through education and training so that it can be taken up by new fields of industry. If there is a decline in tenure among younger workers, this seems to be a consequence of the 2008-9 recession and its aftermath, during which investment has been sluggish in the UK economy. For now, this appears to be a cyclical change; only time will tell whether it become embedded in the labour market through persistently low productivity growth.

8.9 Implications for employment de-standardisation

Similar considerations apply to the de-standardisation of employment. There are a range of different forms of non-standard employment available to employers. However, the overwhelming majority of those in the labour force remain in a single job on a permanent contract, suggesting strong pressures, of the kind identified theoretically in section 8.3, mitigating against the wider use of non-standard forms of employment.

That is not to say that these forms of employment are *never* beneficial to capital. The point is that identifying where this is the case depends on a wide range of considerations, reflecting, crucially, the structuring of labour markets. Key factors include the availability of employees with the appropriate skills (if they are readily available employers will be less concerned about employee turnover) and the cost, in both time and money, associated with training new employees. This, though, does not exhaust the considerations at work. In addition, the nature of the labour process itself may play a role. In section 6.4 it was noted that adult social care without accommodation, by virtue of the time spent by workers travelling between appointments, is, in many ways, the perfect context in which to use zero-hours contracts—provided the extraordinarily high levels of staff turnover can be tolerated. In other areas such as student work in bars and cafes, zero-hour contracts appear to have “formalised” casual employment relations with a far longer history, reflecting the emergence of a large “student labour market” (Doogan, 2009, pp.161-165).

In addition to the contradictory pressures noted above, which play out differently in different areas of work, using non-standard forms of employment can introduce new complications into the workplace. A study of two organisations (Ward et al, 2001)—a major UK clearing bank and a large telecoms provider—considered the problems that emerged when these firms used temporary agency staff as a short-term expedient. Combining permanent and agency staff introduced new challenges for managers, ranging from declining morale among existing employees, and frictions between them and agency workers, to the intricacies of attempting to manage workers with two sets of pay scales and conditions of employment, and difficulties with the screening of potential staff. This compounded the problem of rising labour turnover. In the case of the bank, use of agency workers was sharply curtailed. Furthermore, for many organisations, the lack of long-term investment in staff, for instance by providing training, when non-permanent employees are used has been found to undermine innovation and productivity (Rubery et al, 2016). Another recent study (Giuliano et al, 2017) considered the relationship between productivity and the use of fixed-term contracts across the Belgium economy. The authors conclude:

[F]or the economy as a whole, we find no significant evidence for an effect of a firm's use of temporary employments on its average labour productivity or labour costs. Instead of delivering productivity-enhancing flexibility as expected by many policy makers in the 1990s, having a larger share of the workforce on temporary employments does not appear to have a sizeable impact for the average firm (Giuliano et al, 2017, p.443).

As a result, the authors caution against reasoning in terms of “the average firm” (Giuliano et al, 2017, p.443). Productivity and profitability gains appear to have been clustered in relatively labour-intensive areas of the service sector, rather than in manufacturing, with considerable variation between different forms of service sector work. Furthermore these effects are hard to isolate from other phenomena such as the presence of collective bargaining.

Because non-standard forms of employment can bring benefits to particular employers at particular moments, it is always possible to identify growing groups of precarious workers. The danger comes when this observation is generalised and taken to reflect conditions in the labour market at large, as it often is in the literature. In reality, the structuring of labour markets means that such pockets of precarity are hemmed in by more stable employment relations.

8.10 Some recent trends

There are some signs of employers beginning to question the use of certain forms of non-standard employment, in particular zero-hours contracts, and here a few recent examples may have illustrative value. In April 2017, McDonalds announced that its 115,000 employees in the UK would be able to choose between retaining their zero-hours contract or moving to a fixed-hours contract—with four, eight, 16, 30 or 35 hours per week, reflecting their prior average working hours. This move followed a local trial in which about 20 percent of workers chose to move off zero-hours contracts. McDonalds cited the difficulty in staff accessing “some financial products” as one reason for allowing employees the option of a fixed-hour contract but also noted “an increase in the level of employee and customer satisfaction after the offer” (Ruddick, 2017). While there had been protests at McDonalds' use of zero-hours contracts, a factor that doubtless affected thinking among managers at the corporation, the shift also reflects longer-term concerns. As early as 2006 it was reported that McDonalds had, in the UK, cut its 90-day staff turnover levels by 30 percent in just nine months, saving an estimated £1.2 million. A McDonalds spokesperson commented on the changes: “Some people are naturally gifted at engaging customers, and we want staff members who enjoy that, as it's not necessarily something you can learn” (Thomas, 2006). Even in this relatively low-skilled industry,

retaining the correct forms of labour-power, in this case with the “customer-facing” skills required to be an effective salesperson, matters. The same sensitivity to staff turnover was reflected in a semi-structured interview with the CEO of McDonald’s Northern European Division, which covers the UK:

Employee relationships are also important—we are part of the eating out sector, we’re part of retail in this country that has a relatively high turnover of employees...we provide our employees with the opportunities to study for qualifications...whilst they’re working...the value proposition for our employees and hence the loyalty we get impacts on staff turnover. The more competent and confident our employees are, the more effectively they provide better service to our customers (Ghobadian and O’Regan, 2014, pp.96).

The McDonalds decision came just a few months after the JD Wetherspoon chain of pubs offered its 24,000 employees previously on zero-hours contracts guaranteed hours of at least 70 percent of their typical working week. During a trial, 70 percent of Wetherspoon workers had taken up the offer (Ruddick, 2016). The move prompted an article in *Management Today* entitled “Are zero-hours contracts more trouble than they’re worth?”, asking if it is “possible we’ve hit peak zero-hours”. It went on:

A worker that doesn’t value their job isn’t going to be motivated and work in the best interests of a company. It’s a lot harder to give a toss about a customer’s whims and fancies when you don’t feel like your boss gives a toss about yours. There are other downsides too—your freedom to only use staff when you need them is matched by theirs to only work when they want to. You might be in more of a position to refuse than they are, but there’s always a risk staff will leave you in the lurch, and you won’t be able to do a thing about it. And zero-hours workers are more likely to leave, creating a bigger recruitment bill and damaging staff morale. There’s also a reputational risk as zero-hours contracts have become such a political hot potato (Torrance, 2016).

Similarly, in an article in the *Financial Times*, Torsten Bell (2017), director of the Resolution Foundation, argues, “We appear to have passed peak insecurity.” He points out that the growth of zero-hours contracts “flatlined” in the second half of 2016, while the number of agency workers fell. As with the analysis in chapter 6, Bell notes the role of the economic cycle in this. His argument is that, rather than growing employment feeding through into higher wages, by late 2016 it was “forcing firms to improve the quality, if not yet the pay levels, of work”.

The state also continues to play the contradictory role identified above, at times intervening in labour markets to enforce a basic degree of security for workers, thus ensuring a level playing field. For instance, in August 2016, retailer Sports Direct admitted

that warehouse workers, most of who were employed through agencies, had not received the minimum wage. They agreed to pay compensation after an intervention by the UK's tax authorities. The company and employment agencies that supply it with staff also face fines from the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Goodley, 2016a). Following a dispute at Deliveroo, which delivers fast food using cycle couriers, also in August 2016, the same government department told the company that they had to pay the minimum wage to workers who were notionally self-employed (Goodley, 2016b).

These kinds of cases helped fuel calls for an inquiry into contemporary working practices, leading to the establishment by the government of the independent review, overseen by Matthew Taylor, which reported on 11 July 2017. The submission to the Taylor inquiry from the Confederation of British Industry (CBI), the main employers' organisation, makes for particularly interesting reading. The submission is broadly in favour of "flexibility" in employment, supporting the retention of much of the pre-existing framework of employment law, resisting the introduction of statutory definitions of employment status and seeking to preserve the right to employ agency workers on a pay-between-assignments model. However, the submission adds:

Hiring permanent employees with a guaranteed income in exchange for the employee guaranteeing to be available for agreed working hours is a good deal for business and is the foundation of the workforce...looking ahead, businesses are if anything more focused on expanding permanent recruitment rather than temporary roles. In the CBI's latest survey a balance of +19 percent of firms expect to grow their permanent employment over the next 12 months, while a balance of just +2 percent expect to increase temporary recruitment (CBI, 2017, p.4).

Furthermore, it recommends that employees should have the same right to request fixed hours as they currently have to request flexible working.

Taylor's report in practise largely accepts the positions of the CBI and is regarded by many union leaders and Labour politicians as a "missed opportunity" (Bean, 2017). Its proposal to rename "workers", a category of employees who do not qualify for full employment rights, as "dependent contractors" is entirely superficial, and its proposals for changing the statuses of some of those involved in the gig economy do not go beyond the findings of recent employment tribunals described in this section (Taylor et al, 2017, p.35). One of the few interesting proposals in the review was the suggestion that all hours worked over those included in the contract of employment ought to attract a higher National Minimum Wage (Taylor et al, 2017, p.44). If set at a punitive level, this would be a powerful disincentive for employers to use zero-hours contracts for low-paid roles. This is preferable to outlawing zero-hours contracts both because a ban would allow employers to simply introduce short-hours contracts instead and because for well-paid

positions involving occasional work zero-hours contracts might well be entirely appropriate. Taylor's proposal overcomes both objections. However, the report's authors simply subcontract it to the government and the Low Pay Commission to "consider the design and impact" of such a premium level National Minimum Wage (Taylor et al, 2017, p.44).

8.11 Summary

This chapter suggests that new approaches to the analysis of labour markets, rooted in a classical Marxist tradition, offer substantial advantages over conventional views, in particular in coming to terms with the relative stability of employment witnessed in the UK. There are contradictory pressures on the employment relationship, which interact in complex, historically determined ways to generate the concrete surface appearance of specific capitalist labour markets. There are also many interacting but distinctive labour markets that are each structured differently. This makes generalisation about changes to labour markets based on the experiences of narrowly defined groups of workers a perilous business. Finally, there are institutional factors, in particular the legal and political climate generated by the state as it seeks to both improve the competitiveness of its capitalists but also secure the long-term reproduction of society, which can sometimes curtail precarity as well as engendering flexibility at other points.

Viewed from this perspective, the results of chapters 6 and 7, which together led to rejection of the proposition of growing precarity in the UK, are less surprising. So too are the recent developments in the UK labour force discussed in section 8.10.

However, one question is left hanging, namely whether the widespread notion of growing precarity reflects, in part, a rise in subjective employment insecurity over the neoliberal period. The following chapter concludes the analysis by examining the evolution of insecurity in the UK during the neoliberal period.

9 An epidemic of insecurity?

9.1 Introduction

The preceding three chapters have called into question the proposition of rising precarity and have sought to explain, on the basis of a classical Marxist account, why this proposition might not apply to the UK during the neoliberal period. But what of insecurity, treated here as the subjective counterpart to precarity? Chapter 4 outlined a proposition of increasing job tenure insecurity: “Over the neoliberal period in the UK, workers’ fears that the employment relationship may be terminated by their employer have grown.” This proposition is widely accepted both among those who believe that employment has become more precarious and those who are more doubtful of that proposition. Here the proposition is tested using data from various UK-based surveys, with the results presented in section 9.2.

A range of potential causes for changes to the level of insecurity are considered. Section 9.3 looks at involuntary redundancy as a driver of insecurity. Section 9.4 considers the spread of insecurity to new groups in the workforce. Section 9.5 asks if security can feasibly said to be engendered under neoliberalism, returning to themes first set out in 4.4.3 above. Chapter 4 also highlighted the importance of distinguishing between job *tenure* insecurity and job *status* insecurity, and that distinction is taken into account here, with job status insecurity examined in section 9.6.

9.2 Has job tenure insecurity grown?

There is a lack of consistent annual data on insecurity for the period under examination. Instead, it is necessary to grapple with a range of different surveys that offer partial coverage. Here four surveys are considered: the British Social Attitudes survey, the Skills and Employment Survey, the Workplace Employment Relations Study and the British Household Panel Survey. The last of these offers the most consistent annual data but only from 1992-3 through to 2008-9. The questions asked in each of these surveys, as well as their underlying methodologies and coverage, differ and so comparisons between different data sets must be made with caution.

Before proceeding to the results of the analysis, it is worth noting two general limitations to survey data of the kind examined in this chapter. The first is that it does not substitute for qualitative studies of workers’ experiences of work and employment, a point already made in chapter 5. The second is that it is difficult to account for changes in people’s *expectations* about security. This is particularly important when questions take a form such as: “Do you agree with the statement, ‘My job is secure’?”. In this sense, questions of the form “Do you think there is any chance at all of you losing your job and becoming

unemployed in the next 12 months?” are more likely to register changes in a consistent manner in a period in which expectations are shifting. Therefore, in this chapter questions in both forms are considered.

9.2.1 *The British Social Attitudes survey*

The British Social Attitudes (BSA) survey is an annual survey of about 3,000 individuals across Britain. Random probability sampling is used to select participants, who are then interviewed in their homes. The BSA has from time to time asked people about their perceived security in the workplace. Those in employment among a subsample of a third of respondents were asked if they agree with the statement “My job is secure” in 1989, 1997 and 2005. The whole sample of employed respondents were asked “How secure do you feel your employment is with your present employer?” in 2005, 2009, 2010. The breakdowns are shown in tables 9.1 and 9.2 respectively.

Table 9.1: Agreement that job is secure (1989, 1997, 2005)

| Do you agree with the statement: “My job is secure”? | 1989 | 1997 | 2005 |
|---|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Strongly agree | 17.2% | 12.2% | 18.6% |
| Agree | 41.0% | 40.2% | 49.7% |
| Neither agree nor disagree | 21.7% | 19.3% | 18.2% |
| Disagree | 15.2% | 21.8% | 10.6% |
| Strongly disagree | 5.0% | 6.4% | 2.9% |

(Source: BSA)

Table 9.2: Perceived employment security (2005, 2009, 2010)

| How secure do you feel your employment is with your present employer? | 2005 | 2009 | 2010 |
|--|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Very secure | 37.3% | 29.8% | 26.1% |
| Secure | 40.6% | 46.0% | 46.4% |
| Neither secure nor insecure | 12.8% | 15.6% | 17.5% |
| Insecure | 7.1% | 6.1% | 7.7% |
| Very insecure | 2.3% | 2.5% | 2.2% |

(Source: BSA)

The presence of 2005 in both tables demonstrates the sensitivity of the responses to the wording of questions on security. While 37.3 percent thought their employment was

“very secure” in 2005, only 18.6 percent strongly agreed with the statement “my job is secure”. This is too big a disparity to be explained by the distinction between a given “job” and “employment” with a given employer. Comparing broader categories from 2005, 77.9 percent deemed their employment either “secure” or “very secure”, whereas the total expressing agreement or strong agreement with the statement “my job is secure” amounted to 68.3 percent. There is still a difference but a far less dramatic one.

The disparity, then, seems to reflect unwillingness among respondents to *strongly* endorse the security of their job. Indeed, among those answering both questions in 2005, only 45.5 percent of those who said they were “very secure” in their employment “strongly” agreed with the statement (49.1 percent merely “agreed”). At the other end of the spectrum, the responses to the two questions match up better. Although respondents were more likely to express disagreement with the statement about job security than to state that they were insecure in their employment, the difference is slight.

Regarding the overall trend, table 9.1 shows increasing job tenure insecurity from 1989 to 1997, with a particularly large drop among those strongly agreeing with the notion that their job was secure. The shift is mainly into the category of those disagreeing, rather than strongly disagreeing, with the statement.

This suggests a rise in what will in this chapter be called *generalised job tenure insecurity*, in contrast to a rise in *acute job tenure insecurity*, with the latter reflecting a high level of fear of imminent job loss. This is the first evidence of a possible distinction between different types of job tenure insecurity, considered in more detail below. By 2005 job tenure insecurity of both forms seems to have fallen back to lower levels than in 1989 or 1997, calling into question the idea that the neoliberal period was, generally, one of rising job tenure insecurity.

Table 9.2 shows what has happened to job tenure insecurity in the wake of the recession. Interestingly, this data does not suggest much of a rise in acute job tenure insecurity. After falling slightly from 2005 to 2009, the numbers feeling either insecure or very insecure rose only slightly in 2010 to 9.9 percent, just 0.5 percent higher than in 2005. This perhaps reflects the tendency of employers to hoard labour rather than shed it as the crisis unfolded. A far bigger shift takes place among those who regarded themselves as very secure, with this figure declining from 37.3 percent in 2005 to 29.8 percent in 2009 and 26.1 percent in 2010. This again seems symptomatic of a rise in *generalised* job tenure insecurity in the wake of the economic crisis.

The BSA offers one additional insight. In 1993 those in employment among two-thirds of the respondents were asked, “Compared with most jobs these days, would you say your job is...” followed by a range of options (table 9.3). Some 85.6 percent of people thought their job had typical levels of security or was more secure than most, which is,

mathematically, an impossibility. This shows that workers tend to overstate job tenure insecurity across the labour force as a whole. It is unfortunate that this data only exists for a single year as it would be a useful source of information about how expectations evolve and to what extent they draw on personal experience.

Table 9.3: Perceived relative job security (1993)

| Compared with most jobs these days, would you say your job is... | 1993 |
|---|-------------|
| Much more secure | 17.6% |
| A bit more secure | 29.5% |
| About average | 38.5% |
| A bit less secure | 9.0% |
| Much less secure | 5.3% |

(Source: BSA)

9.2.2 The Skills and Employment survey

A second source of data on insecurity is the Skills and Employment Survey (SES) and its predecessors, conducted in 1997, 2001, 2006 and 2012, with a sample size ranging from 2,467 up to 7,787. The sample is derived by random sampling of those in employment aged from 20 to 60 (except in 2006 when data was collected on those up to 65), working at least one hour a week and living in private households, using postcodes of those in Great Britain south of the Caledonian Canal, and with a boost for Wales (though the 2006 version also includes the Highlands of Scotland and Northern Ireland). It is designed to be representative of employees in Great Britain. The earlier 1992 Employment in Britain Survey uses a similar methodology and can be used for a longer-term comparison. So too can the 1986 Social Change and Economic Life survey, although this was carried out only in six localities and needs to be treated with more caution. For consistency, in the analysis that follows those over 60 are dropped from the 2006 survey.

Table 9.4 is derived from two questions in the SES data. The first is, “Do you think there is any chance at all of you losing your job and becoming unemployed in the next 12 months?” (the proportion who answered “no” appears in the top line of data); the second is, “From this card [the showcard] how would you rate the likelihood of this happening?”. Note that this question about a perceived *likelihood* of an event is of a quite different form from the questions in the BSA, which are about *feelings* of insecurity.

Despite the different form of the question, a similar pattern emerges. The proportion of people who believe it “very likely” that they will lose their job peaks in the mid-1980s. This measure of acute job tenure insecurity then falls, only recovering a little in the wake

of the 2008-9 recession. Generalised job tenure insecurity (those who think it quite likely or an even chance they will lose their job) grows from 1986 to 1997, and, in the wake of the 2008-9 recession, reaches unprecedented levels. Conversely, the proportion feeling there is no likelihood at all of losing their job declines in these periods of generalised job tenure insecurity.

Table 9.4: Perceived likelihood of job loss (1986, 1997, 2001, 2006, 2012)

| Likelihood of losing job in next 12 months | 1986 | 1997 | 2001 | 2006 | 2012 |
|---|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| None | 79.7% | 77.0% | 83.5% | 82.3% | 74.7% |
| Very unlikely | 1.3% | 1.3% | 1.0% | 0.7% | 0.8% |
| Quite unlikely | 3.6% | 5.3% | 3.7% | 4.4% | 6.2% |
| Evens | 6.7% | 9.4% | 5.8% | 6.9% | 10.5% |
| Quite likely | 4.0% | 3.4% | 3.1% | 3.4% | 5.0% |
| Very likely | 4.6% | 3.6% | 2.9% | 2.4% | 2.8% |

(Source: SES)

A second question, asked in this survey in 1992, 2006 and 2012, is whether people are *satisfied* with their job security (table 9.5). Compared with 1992 (in the wake of a recession), 2006 shows higher satisfaction, but the figure then falls to very low levels in the wake of the 2008-9 recession. In total in 2012, 11.4 percent of those surveyed expressed some level of dissatisfaction; in 1992 it was 15.6 percent. The picture here is of high levels of both generalised and acute job tenure insecurity in the early 1990s.

Table 9.5: Satisfaction with job security (1992, 2006, 2012)

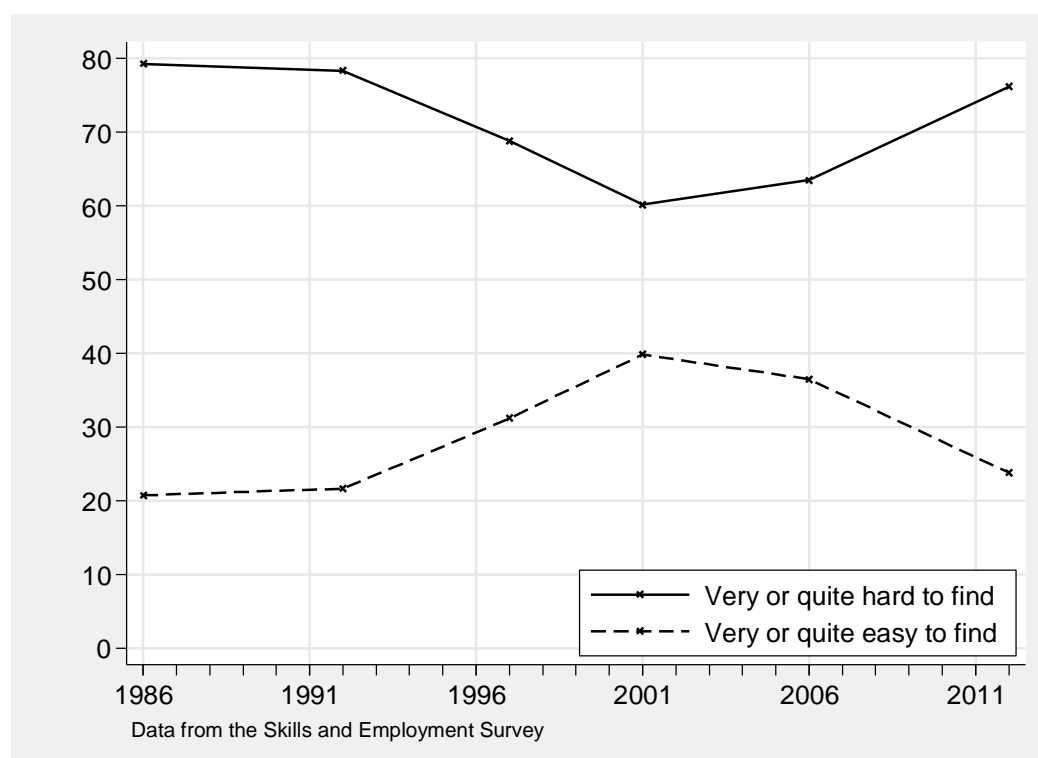
| Satisfaction with job security | 1992 | 2006 | 2012 |
|---------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Completely satisfied | 17.6% | 19.5% | 15.2% |
| Very satisfied | 24.7% | 31.2% | 26.2% |
| Fairly satisfied | 30.7% | 29.3% | 32.3% |
| Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied | 11.4% | 10.9% | 15.0% |
| Fairly dissatisfied | 8.1% | 5.4% | 6.2% |
| Very dissatisfied | 3.7% | 1.9% | 2.8% |
| Completely dissatisfied | 3.8% | 1.9% | 2.4% |

(Source: SES)

In 2006 and 2012 it is possible to compare the two sets of data. For instance, in 2006, 82.3 percent said that there was “no chance” that they would lose their job in the next 12 months, yet only 19.5 percent were “completely satisfied” with their job security. However, aggregating all those categories with some degree of satisfaction approximates

the figure for those who felt there was no chance of losing their job. This again suggests that people can be confident about retaining their job in the coming year but still only feel “fairly” satisfied about this level of security. Measures of satisfaction with job security reflect more than simply the fear of job loss in the near future. This reinforces the possibility, discussed in chapter 4, that dissatisfaction with other aspects of the job may be misinterpreted in the data as dissatisfaction with job tenure security, a point returned to in sections 9.5 and 9.6 below.

Figure 9.1: Perceived ease of finding a job as good as current one (1986-2012)



In 1986 and 1992 there was additional information about how people felt their job security had changed for them in the preceding five years. In 1986, about half (48 percent) of those responding felt there had been no change, with a quarter (26 percent) feeling security had increased and the same proportion feeling it had decreased. Most of this period consisted of economic recovery from the recession of the early 1980s. By contrast, in the five years to 1992, during which time the economy entered recession, only 36 percent felt there had been no change, 26 percent believed there had been an increase in their job security with 37 percent believing their security had fallen. Again, these figures show sensitivity to the wider economic situation.

Finally, SES tracks how easy people believe it would be for them to find a job as good as their current one. The data is shown in figure 9.1. This offers a different window on insecurity to the other questions, because it reflects people's perception of the labour market more generally, rather than the security of their current employment. As might be expected, in the wake of the early 1980s and early 1990s recessions, people consider that it would be hard to find a job as good as their present one. In the period of recovery—1997, 2001 and 2006—they perceive it as much easier, with almost twice as many saying that it would be quite or very easy in 2001 than ten years earlier. After the recession the figure falls back to levels close to those of 1986 or 1991. These results help to explain the countercyclical pattern of tenure discussed in chapter 7 in which increased confidence of obtaining a better job reduces tenure in periods of economic strength.

9.2.3 *The Workplace Employment Relations Survey*

The past three iterations of the Workplace Employment Relations Survey (WERS) and its predecessors, from 1998, 2004 and 2011, contain questions related to insecurity. WERS is based on a representative sample of workplaces, rather than households. In the 2011 version this consisted of a sample of workplaces with five or more employees. Both managers and worker representatives are surveyed, along with employees. Here the employee survey is used. About 20,000 employees undertook the survey in 2011, with the survey conducted using a paper or online questionnaire.

Table 9.6: Perceived job tenure security (1998, 2004, 2011)

| I feel my job is secure in this workplace | 1998 | 2004 | 2011 |
|--|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Strong agree | 13.2% | 19.0% | 16.6% |
| Agree | 46.8% | 48.1% | 43.9% |
| Neither agree nor disagree | 20.7% | 18.0% | 21.1% |
| Disagree | 14.0% | 11.1% | 13.3% |
| Strongly disagree | 5.3% | 4.0% | 5.1% |

(Source: WERS)

Table 9.6 shows the response to a question on security in the workplace for all three years. This data fits with the patterns already established. Job tenure insecurity declines from 1998 to 2004, before rising in the wake of the 2008-9 recession, although here job tenure insecurity (in its acute or general forms) does not quite reach 1998 levels by 2011.

For the two most recent survey years, there is also data on satisfaction with job security (table 9.7). For both years, the data aligns relatively closely with that already examined

but with a slight pull away from the extremes when the question is posed in these terms. The close alignment of the responses to the two questions may reflect the mode of the survey, with respondents able to compare their responses to the two questions when completing a written questionnaire.

Table 9.7: Satisfaction with job security (2004, 2011)

| How satisfied are you with your job security? | 2004 | 2011 |
|--|-------------|-------------|
| Very satisfied | 14.0% | 13.2% |
| Satisfied | 50.4% | 45.5% |
| Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied | 21.4% | 23.4% |
| Dissatisfied | 9.8% | 12.3% |
| Very dissatisfied | 4.4% | 5.7% |

(Source: WERS)

9.2.4 The British Household Panel Survey

The British Household Panel Survey (BHPS) is an annual panel survey conducted from 1991-2 through to 2008-9, after which it was subsumed into the Understanding Society Survey (USS), also known as the UK Household Longitudinal Study. The initial panel was drawn from 5,500 households in Britain, consisting of 10,300 individuals. Northern Ireland was added to the BHPS in 2001. The survey is representative of the British, and later the UK, population. As it has a panel design, the BHPS tracks given individuals across successive waves. As noted in chapter 4, the data for 1991-2 cannot be used for comparative purposes because of changes to the showcard after this year (Burchell, 2002). Removing this year from the data, the remaining years are shown in table 9.8, treating each iteration of the BHPS as a separate cross-section.

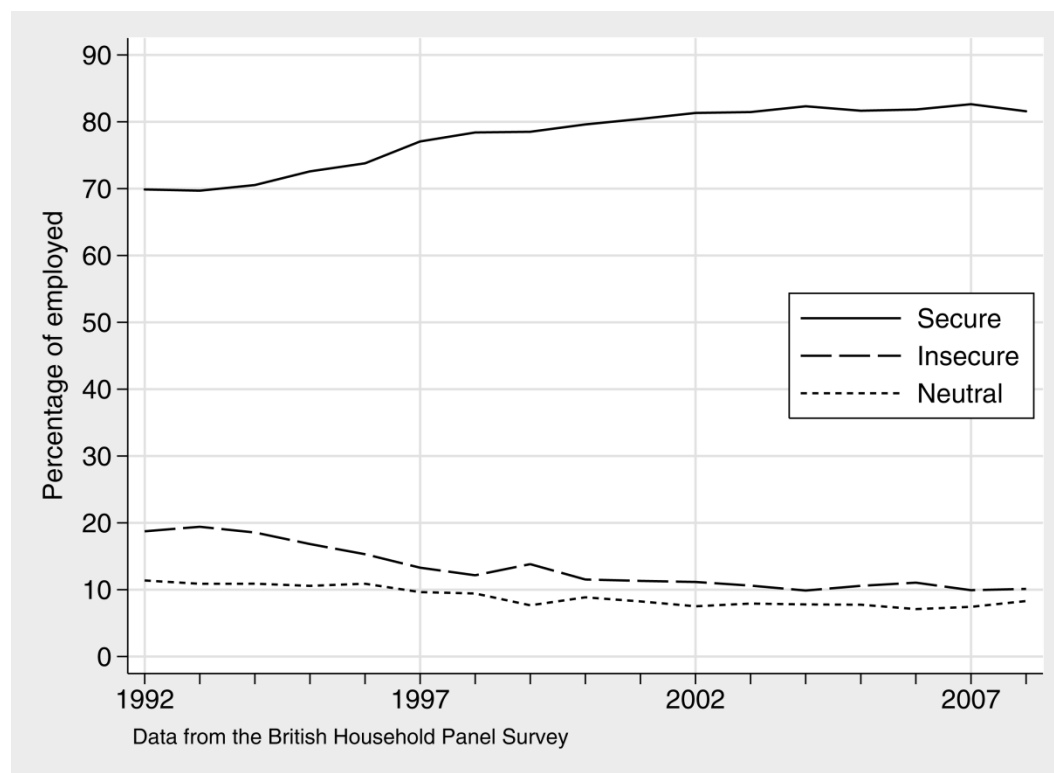
Figure 9.2 displays the overall proportion of those expressing some degree of security or insecurity (categories 5-7 and 1-3 of table 9.8 respectively), along with those expressing neither, over the period covered by the BHPS. (Year numbers refer to the first of the two years spanned by each iteration of the BHPS, the year in which in each case most of the interviews fell.) The figure demonstrates the fall in generalised job tenure insecurity from the high level it was at in the early to mid-1990s. By 1997 generalised job tenure insecurity begins to level out, though the general trajectory is still of a gradual decline up until the crisis of 2008-9 when the data ends. Unfortunately, once the BHPS is subsumed into the USS the job security question is dropped from the questionnaire. Given the degree of interest in job security within academia and in society at large, and the impact of the recent recession on the UK labour market, this seems perverse.

Table 9.8: Degree of satisfaction with job security (1992-3 to 2008-9)

| Years | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
|-----------|------|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| 1992-3 | 6.0% | 3.6% | 9.2% | 11.4% | 17.4% | 28.3% | 24.2% |
| 1993-4 | 5.1% | 4.3% | 10.0% | 10.9% | 17.3% | 30.2% | 22.1% |
| 1994-5 | 6.1% | 4.1% | 8.4% | 10.9% | 18.2% | 30.4% | 21.9% |
| 1995-6 | 4.7% | 3.6% | 8.5% | 10.6% | 18.7% | 32.3% | 21.6% |
| 1996-7 | 4.0% | 3.4% | 8.0% | 10.9% | 17.5% | 33.0% | 23.3% |
| 1997-8 | 3.5% | 2.9% | 6.9% | 9.6% | 18.1% | 34.6% | 24.3% |
| 1998-9 | 2.4% | 2.8% | 7.0% | 9.4% | 19.3% | 36.3% | 22.8% |
| 1999-2000 | 3.0% | 3.8% | 7.0% | 7.7% | 17.2% | 39.5% | 21.8% |
| 2000-1 | 2.2% | 3.0% | 6.3% | 8.9% | 19.3% | 40.2% | 20.1% |
| 2001-2 | 2.4% | 2.2% | 6.6% | 8.2% | 19.9% | 39.3% | 21.2% |
| 2002-3 | 2.3% | 2.4% | 6.5% | 7.5% | 18.4% | 41.4% | 21.5% |
| 2003-4 | 1.5% | 2.6% | 6.5% | 7.9% | 18.7% | 41.0% | 21.8% |
| 2004-5 | 1.9% | 2.4% | 5.6% | 7.8% | 17.8% | 41.7% | 22.8% |
| 2005-6 | 1.8% | 2.2% | 6.6% | 7.8% | 18.5% | 40.7% | 22.5% |
| 2006-7 | 2.3% | 2.3% | 6.4% | 7.1% | 20.4% | 40.0% | 21.4% |
| 2007-8 | 1.9% | 2.2% | 5.8% | 7.4% | 19.0% | 41.9% | 21.8% |
| 2008-9 | 1.7% | 2.6% | 5.8% | 8.3% | 22.8% | 40.0% | 18.8% |

1="Not at all satisfied"; 4="Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied"; 7="Completely satisfied"
(Source: BHPS)

Figure 9.2: Percentage employed with some of security/insecurity (1992-2008)

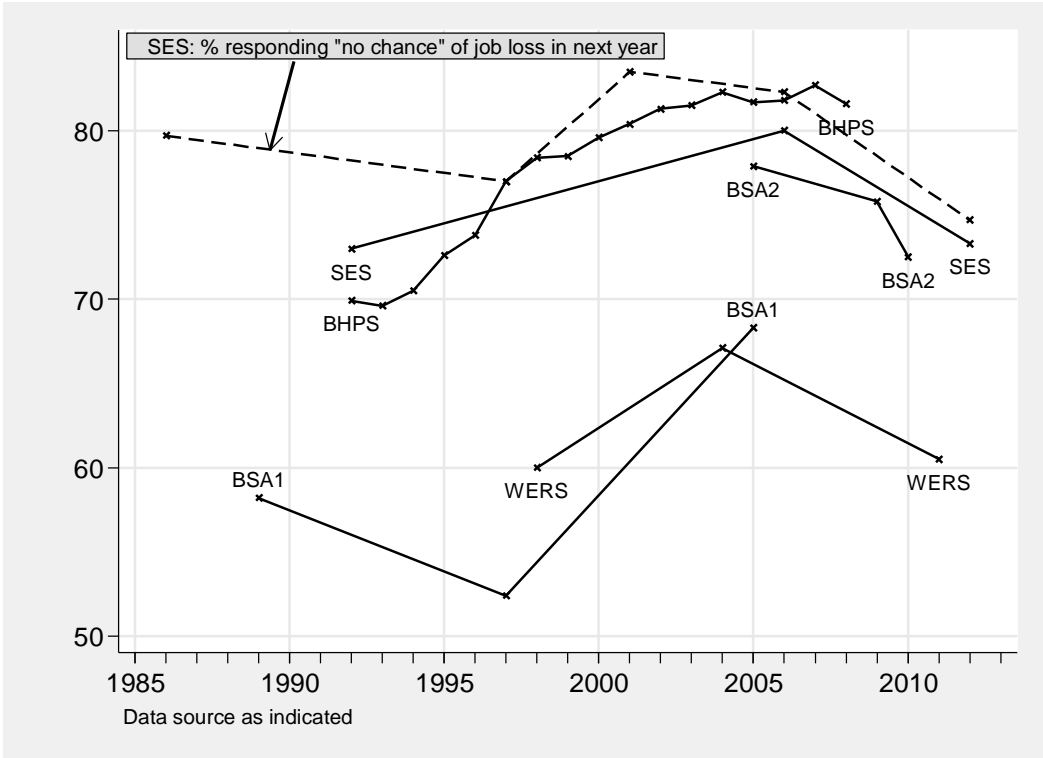


Acute job tenure insecurity can be explored by examining column 1 in table 9.8. Here, too, the proportion expressing this form of insecurity seems to fall from the early 1990s, when it was high in the wake of the recession of 1990-1. In the absence of earlier data, which, based on the other surveys considered, might have shown higher acute and lower generalised job tenure insecurity in the 1980s, the pattern for the two forms of insecurity looks quite similar. This might also reflect the form taken by the question, with numerical values rather than descriptions attached to the level of insecurity.

9.2.5 A combined picture

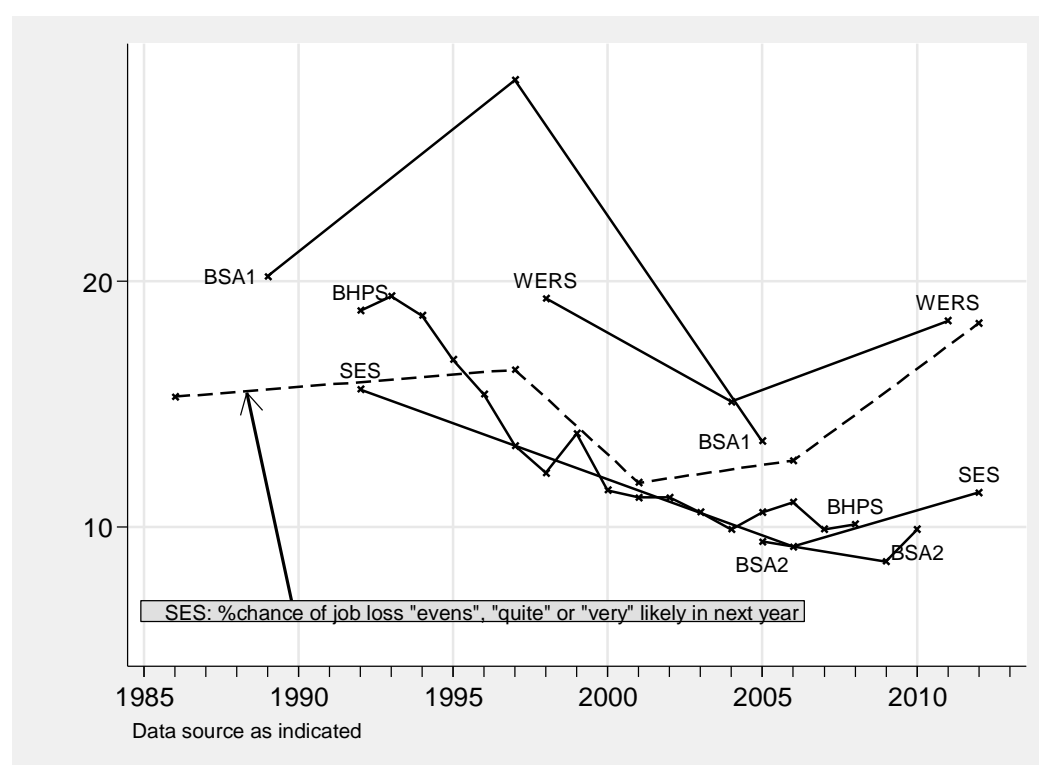
The various measures of insecurity considered are not directly comparable. Nonetheless, it is possible to derive a rough picture of the trends across the neoliberal period by presenting the snapshots of insecurity from the various surveys together. This has been done in figures 9.3 and 9.4. These figures exclude those who indicate that they feel neither secure nor insecure. The other categories in each survey are combined to generate an aggregate indicator of some degree of job tenure security or insecurity. The dashed lines show selected data from the SES on perceptions about the likelihood of job loss in the next 12 months, which offers the longest span of data related to a consistent question.

Figure 9.3: Percentage feeling secure



This combined picture challenges the notion of a persistent, secular rise in job tenure insecurity across the neoliberal period. There are instead modest shifts in the scale and nature of insecurity throughout, which are sensitive to economic fluctuations, though not reducible to them. While there was a rise in generalised job tenure insecurity in the early 1990s, from the mid-1990s until the recession of 2008-9 the trajectory seems, if anything, to echo the findings of the BHPS: a declining trend in generalised job tenure insecurity. Insecurity rose again with the recent recession, but probably only to levels comparable with those in the 1990s. The perceived likelihood of losing a job in the coming 12 months, reported by the SES, follows a broadly similar pattern. From this we can conclude that the proposition of rising job tenure insecurity in the neoliberal period is unproved. Instead the neoliberal period can be divided into four distinct phases, shown in table 9.9.

Figure 9.4: Percentage feeling insecure



The two figures also offer an opportunity to contrast questions of the form, “Do you agree with the statement, ‘My job is secure?’” (solid lines), with those of the form, “Do you think there is any chance at all of you losing your job and becoming unemployed in the next 12 months?” (dashed lines). As noted above, the former type of question, in which people are asked about their feelings, is more likely to be vulnerable to changing expectations about security in a given period, whereas the latter, being a subjective estimate of the likelihood of an objective event, should be less so. One recommendation that arises from this is that surveys measuring insecurity should, in future, ask *both* kinds of questions, allowing a

more detailed understanding of the role of expectations in measuring security. However, based on the two figures, the overall pattern seems consistent as the dashed and solid lines follow the same rough trajectory.

Table 9.9: Broad patterns of job tenure insecurity

| Period | Pattern |
|----------------------|---|
| Mid- to late 1980s | Highest levels of acute job tenure insecurity, perhaps a result of high level of redundancies in manufacturing industry in the wake of the early 1980s recession, with both forms of insecurity falling as recovery develops. |
| Early to mid-1990s | Acute job tenure insecurity at lower levels than in the mid-1980s, but a rise in generalised job tenure insecurity in the wake of the early 1990s recession. |
| Late 1990s to 2008-9 | Declining job tenure insecurity in both categories as recovery proceeds. |
| After 2008-9 | A rise in generalised job tenure insecurity and a more muted rise in acute job tenure insecurity in the wake of the 2008-9 recession. |

Having established the basic patterns at play, the analysis now turns to potential explanations for the development of insecurity through the neoliberal period.

9.3 Insecurity and redundancy

It is noted above that acute job tenure insecurity seems to reflect closely the impact of recessions on the labour market. This raises the possibility that job tenure insecurity tracks the actual likelihood of job loss, as measured by the involuntary redundancy rate.

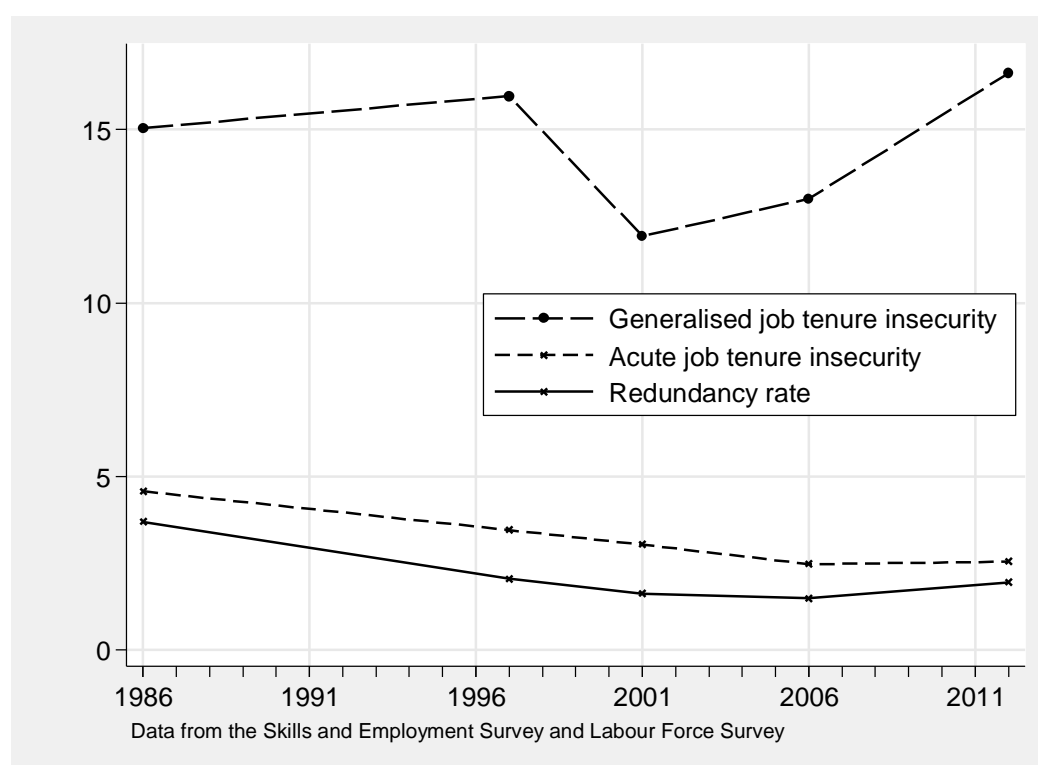
The probability of involuntary redundancy can be estimated by dividing the number of former employees who claim they have lost their job due to dismissal or redundancy (but not voluntary redundancy) in the previous three months by the total number in employment using Labour Force Survey data. The redundancy rate is estimated for each year for which SES data on perceived likelihood of job loss is available: 1986, 1997, 2001, 2006 and 2012.

In 1986 the Labour Force Survey is annual, though the fieldwork is conducted from March to May 1986. For the subsequent years, the Q2 data (April-June) is used consistently to minimise seasonal variation. The levels of job tenure insecurity and the redundancy rate are shown in figure 9.5. Note that the estimated redundancy rate here is slightly different from the rate conventionally produced by the Office for National Statistics, or that given in section 7.4 above, which present it as redundancies per 1,000 employees. ONS figures also

include voluntary redundancies. Their denominator is employment in the preceding, rather than current, three months, which makes only a small difference to the figure.

It is not unreasonable to conclude from figure 9.5 that *acute* job tenure insecurity, when operationalised as the extent to which employees believe they are very likely to lose their job in the coming 12 months, closely tracks the actual likelihood of employees losing their jobs. This disarmingly simple explanation seems to have been largely overlooked in the literature, yet no further explanation is required. If acute job tenure insecurity has fallen during the neoliberal period, it is because the involuntary redundancy rate has also fallen since the 1980s. The 1990s and 2000s have not, in general, been a period of increasing involuntary redundancy.

Figure 9.5: Insecurity and redundancy rates (1986, 1997, 2001, 2006, 2012)



The level of acute job tenure insecurity is in fact consistently slightly above the actual likelihood of involuntary job loss, but the difference is never more than 1.5 percent of all employees in the years examined. By contrast, the measure of *generalised* job tenure insecurity, which here includes all those who think there is some chance of losing their job in the coming year, has a far less clear relationship to the rate of involuntary redundancy—indeed, according to figure 9.5, it rises in the period from 1986 to 1997 despite *declining* involuntary redundancies. This supports the idea that generalised job

tenure insecurity is more susceptible to ideational factors, and these possible drivers of generalised job tenure insecurity are now considered.

9.4 Insecurity and “voice”

Chapter 4 considered the proposition that one of the ideological drivers of insecurity might be the migration of job tenure insecurity to groups with a greater “voice” due to their perceived higher status in society at large. Obvious categories to investigate include managers and professionals. The SES data for these groups from 1986 to 2012 can be compared. Table 9.10 compares those with supervisory authority to those without; table 9.11 compares “professionals”, which here also includes all managers and associate professionals, to others. In both cases only those in employment are considered. In these tables, those who believe their chance of losing a job is “evens”, or “quite” or “very” likely are deemed insecure.

Table 9.10: Managerial insecurity (1986-2012)

| | Managers and supervisors | Others | Prob > F |
|-------------|---------------------------------|---------------|--------------------|
| 1986 | 10.4% | 19.1% | 0.0000** |
| 1997 | 14.3% | 17.6% | 0.0591 |
| 2001 | 9.5% | 14.2% | 0.0000** |
| 2006 | 9.8% | 15.8% | 0.0000** |
| 2012 | 15.6% | 19.6% | 0.0334* |

** = difference significant at 1% level, * = difference significant at 5% level (Source: SES)

Table 9.11: Professional insecurity (1986-2012)

| | Senior officials, managers, professionals, technicians and associate professionals | Others | Prob > F |
|-------------|---|---------------|--------------------|
| 1986 | 12.2% | 17.1% | 0.0004** |
| 1997 | 16.4% | 16.1% | 0.8795 |
| 2001 | 11.1% | 12.9% | 0.1456 |
| 2006 | 12.3% | 13.9% | 0.1680 |
| 2012 | 16.0% | 19.3% | 0.0765 |

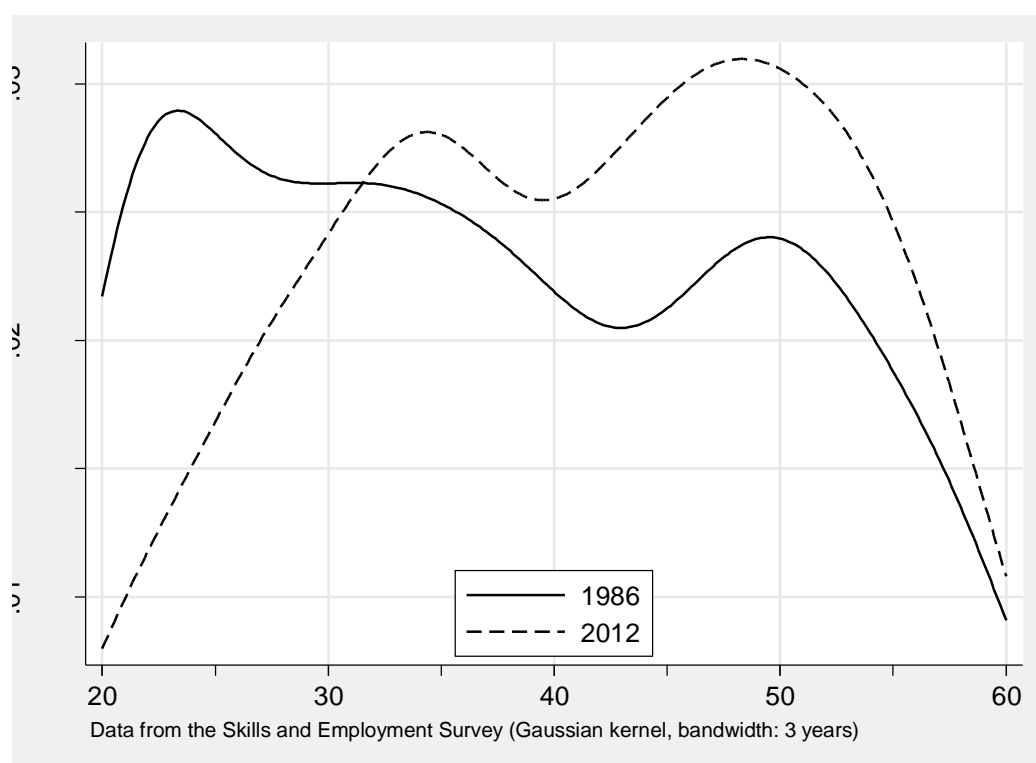
** = difference significant at 1% level, * = difference significant at 5% level (Source: SES)

Table 9.10 shows a convergence of insecurity between supervisors and non-supervisors in 1997 and 2012. These are precisely the periods in which generalised job tenure insecurity runs at the highest levels. The convergence is reflected in the decreased level of significance of differences between the groups as measured by the adjusted Wald statistic in the right-hand column.

For professionals, as shown in table 9.11, insecurity is not statistically different from that of non-professionals after 1986, suggesting some convergence after the 1980s, especially in 1997 when insecurity among professionals slightly exceeds that of non-professionals.

It should be noted that there have, over the neoliberal period, been changes to both the structure of management in many workplaces, potentially giving supervisory authority to new groups of workers, and changes to the nature of the “professions”, with substantial unionisation and rising militancy among groups such as teachers or health workers. The changes do not, therefore, necessarily imply a shift in security between two static groups and may instead be a product of the growing together of different forms of work. Whatever the reasons, the proposition that insecurity spread among professionals and managers seems well founded. The shift may also reflect the way in which the most recent recession tended to exert a generalised pressure across the workforce, rather than resulting in large numbers of redundancies in manufacturing as in previous recessions.

Figure 9.6: Kernel density of job tenure insecurity by age (1986, 2012)



If this is the case, the spread of insecurity to these groups may have amplified fears of insecurity, in particular generalised job tenure insecurity, as the neoliberal period proceeded.

Not only has insecurity spread through professional and managerial groups, but it has also increased among older workers, as figure 9.6 shows. Here just two years are shown to allow comparison, 1986 and 2012. These are chosen for comparison because they stand near either end of the period under consideration and they are at roughly similar points in successive business cycle. Insecurity is defined as in the tables presented above. The shift in insecurity towards the over-40s is striking.

9.5 Engendering insecurity

As noted in section 9.3, there is strong evidence that changes in *acute* job tenure insecurity are a result of changes in the actual likelihood of involuntary job loss. It has also been shown that the spread of insecurity to new groups, potentially with a greater voice, might amplify *generalised* job tenure insecurity. It remains to be considered whether insecurity is engendered by employers or the wider ruling class in the neoliberal period and what form this might take.

The growing professionalisation of management from the 1970s gained pace just as a neoliberal regime was emerging in which the pressure of competition was brought to bear with greater intensity on workplaces. From the 1980s this also took place in the context of a relative decline in workplace union organisation and struggle. While the imperative to extract surplus-value from workers through exploitation is a constant, as Hyman (1987, p.30) argues, this does not negate the strategic role of management: “Strategic choice exists, not because of the absence or weakness of structural determinations, but because these determinations are themselves contradictory.” This suggests possible changes in strategy in the neoliberal period.

Kevin Doogan (2009, p.32) points out, based on a critical reading of *The New Spirit of Capitalism* by Boltanski and Chiapello (2005), that by the 1990s, in consequence of the turn to neoliberalism, a new and pervasive managerial rhetoric had emerged stressing the extent to which “unplanned markets determine the success and profitability of firms as long as there is sufficient internal adaptability and flexibility”. The penetration of these market forces can also increase the *consequences* of job loss, as discussed in section 4.4.2 above. This can alter perceptions of insecurity regardless of the actual probability of job loss. There is, in other words, a “manufactured uncertainty” (Doogan, 2009, p.202).

Furthermore, changes to welfare provision often have as their basic intention the engendering of insecurity. For instance, the “workfare” programmes, introduced by

governments of various stripes since the 1980s, along with the reduction of welfare relative to real wages, were punitive measures aimed at supposedly “workshy” workers (Deeming, 2015). These measures also contributed to an atmosphere in which there was a “popular drift away from support for better welfare...towards the now popular belief that [benefits] are, in fact, too generous and thereby encourage ‘welfare dependency’” (Deeming, 2015, p.870).

The counterpart within the workplace itself is an intensification of labour, which, as noted in section 4.4.3 appears to have taken place in the 1990s in particular. One consequence has been the growing role of “performance management” systems that appraise and monitor productivity in order to align work processes with overall strategic goals. Use of “holistic” performance management systems, incorporating everything from recruitment to bonuses, training to termination, increased from 69 to 87 percent of respondents in the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development surveys reported in 1998 and 2005 (Taylor, 2013, p.22). Their use has also spread beyond private sector workplaces into the public sector, for instance in schools and civil service offices, in an attempt to make these forms of work more cost effective through Taylorist techniques (Mather and Seifert, 2011; Carter et al, 2011).

Such changes ought to be expressed through growing job status insecurity, relating to the loss of valued features of the job. As noted in section 4.4.3 it is plausible that increases in job status insecurity could be interpreted as increasing job tenure insecurity, either because the data is misconstrued or because workers themselves express one form of insecurity as the other. Given that acute job tenure insecurity needs no such explanation this mechanism ought to apply, if it applies at all, to generalised job tenure insecurity. The following section will consider the evolution of job status insecurity and ask whether its growth might be implicated in growing generalised job tenure insecurity in the early to mid-1990s and since the 2008-9 recession.

9.6 The rise of job status insecurity

According to Gallie et al (2017) and Gallie et al (2012) there is a broad consensus on the valued features of jobs in the UK. Following these authors, and using the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic factors introduced by Green (2011), it is possible to identify a range of relevant drivers of job status insecurity. These include extrinsic factors, such as pay and hours of work, and intrinsic factors, such as fear of victimisation or discrimination, loss of autonomy, deskilling and loss of variety of workplace tasks.

Before looking in more detail at these different factors, the overall trend of job satisfaction, based on the BHPS and SES data, can be explored.

Green (2007, p.154) shows a pronounced decline in the proportion of those saying they are “completely satisfied” with their job from 1992 to 2001 according to the BHPS. However, as figure 9.7 shows, this figure stabilises around 1998. Furthermore, the proportion expressing *some* degree of satisfaction remains fairly constant across the whole period up to the recession of 2008-9. Therefore growing job status insecurity, conceived in these broad terms, appears to be concentrated in the 1990s.

The SES data (figure 9.8) gives a similar picture but with slight differences. Here both categories of satisfaction decline in the 1990s, followed by a modest recovery up to the 2008-9 recession. After the recession, satisfaction falls, again in both categories. The findings of Gallie et al (2017), which showed a rise in job status insecurity from 2000 to 2012, were, as noted in chapter 4, based on a comparison of two different surveys, posing the problem of methodological consistency in a situation in which measures are extremely sensitive to the question asked and how it is asked. When the same dataset is used throughout the period (as in figure 9.8) the changes in the 2000s seem even more modest than in their account.

All that can be said based on this data is that there appears to be growing dissatisfaction with work in the mid to late 1990s and in the wake of the 2008-9 recession.

Figure 9.7: Overall satisfaction with employment (1992-2008)

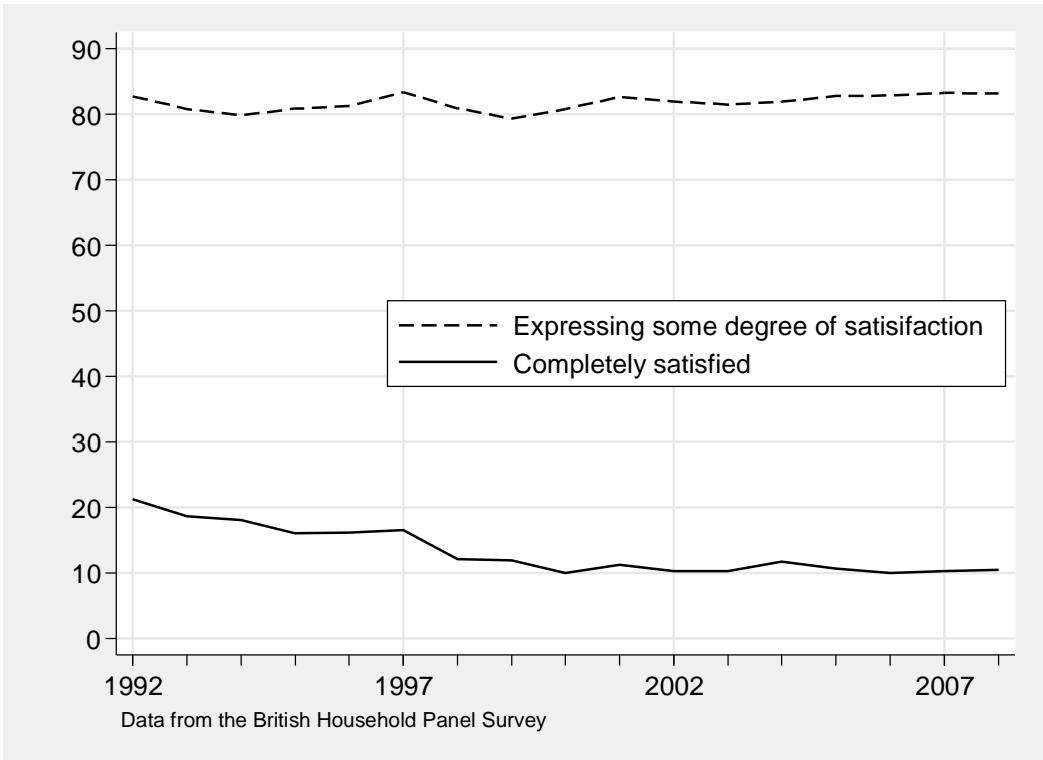
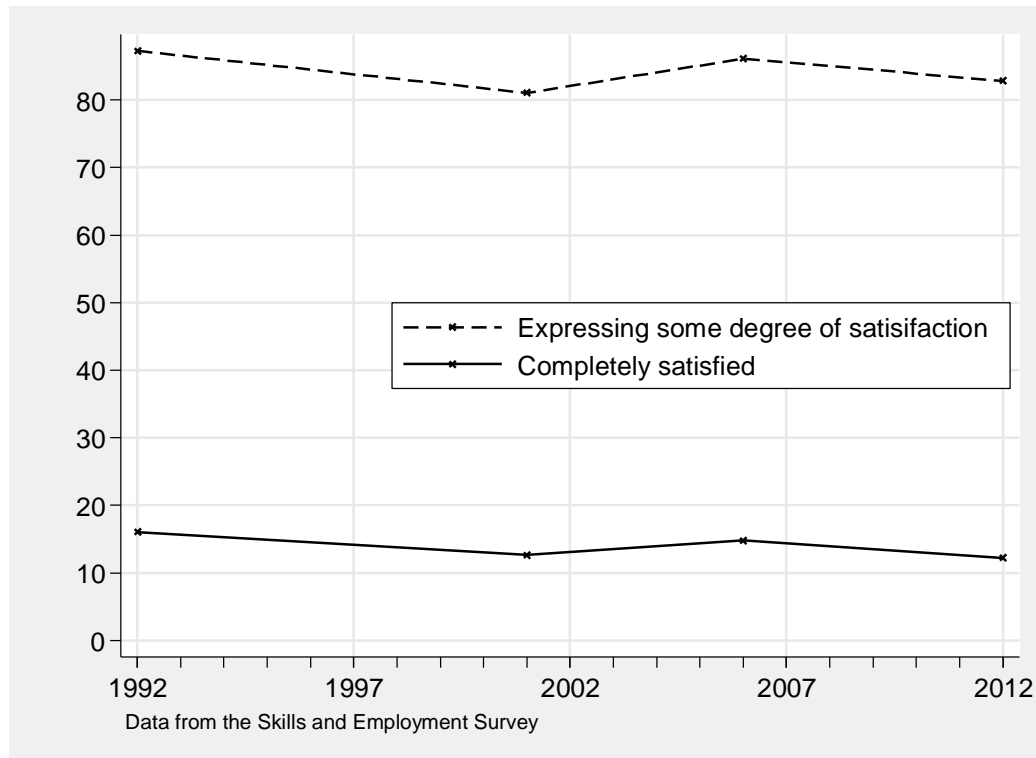


Figure 9.8: Overall satisfaction with employment (1992-2012)



9.6.1 Extrinsic factors

The BHPS also allows an examination of satisfaction with pay and hours worked. Figure 9.9 shows satisfaction and complete satisfaction with total pay. While complete satisfaction has declined very slightly, satisfaction as a whole rose, at least until the recession of 2008-9, and notably leaped up in 1998, presumably as a result of the introduction of a national minimum wage that year. This result is perhaps not surprising, as real wages were, on average, trending up until the most recent recession (Green, 2011, p.115). The SES has only limited data on satisfaction over pay. However, the proportion expressing some degree of satisfaction with pay in this data falls from 65.8 percent to 62.0 percent from 2006 to 2012, as might be expected in a period of historically exceptional pay curbs.

Satisfaction with hours worked (figure 9.10) more closely resembles the data on overall job satisfaction. Complete satisfaction declines until 2000, when it stabilises, although most workers continue to express some degree of satisfaction. Again, SES gives a limited insight into the post-recessionary trend, with those expressing some degree of satisfaction with their hours falling slightly from 16.6 percent in 2006 to 15.1 percent in 2012.

Figure 9.9: Satisfaction with total pay (1992-2008)

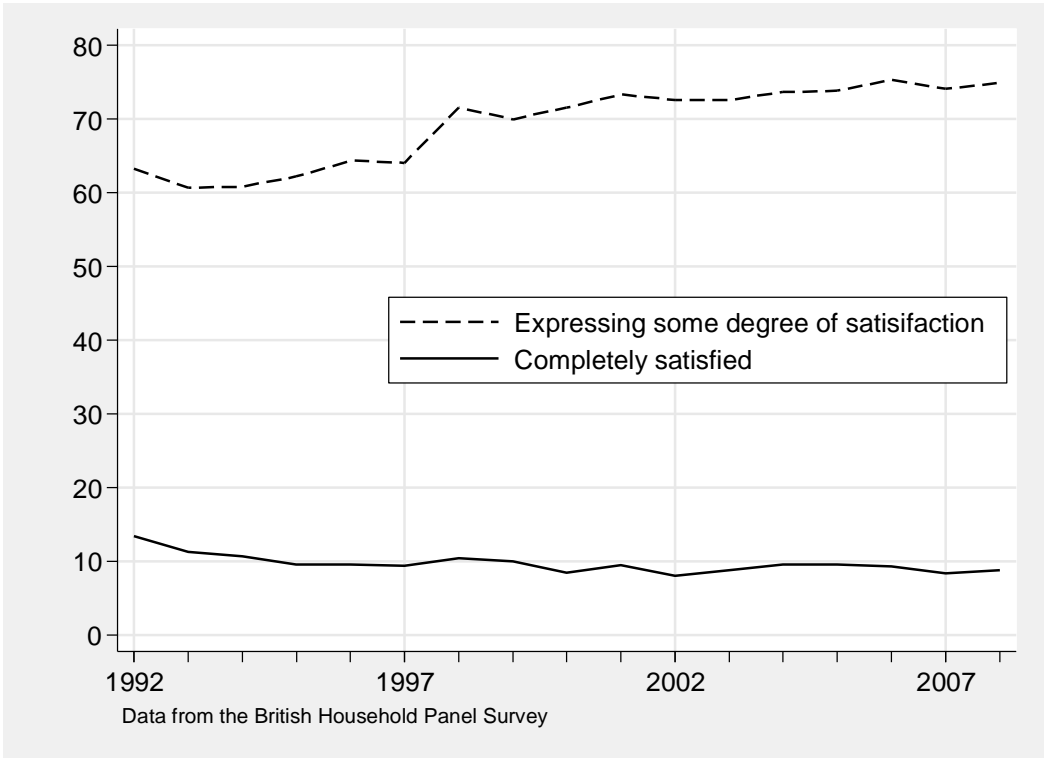


Figure 9.10: Satisfaction with hours worked (1992-2008)

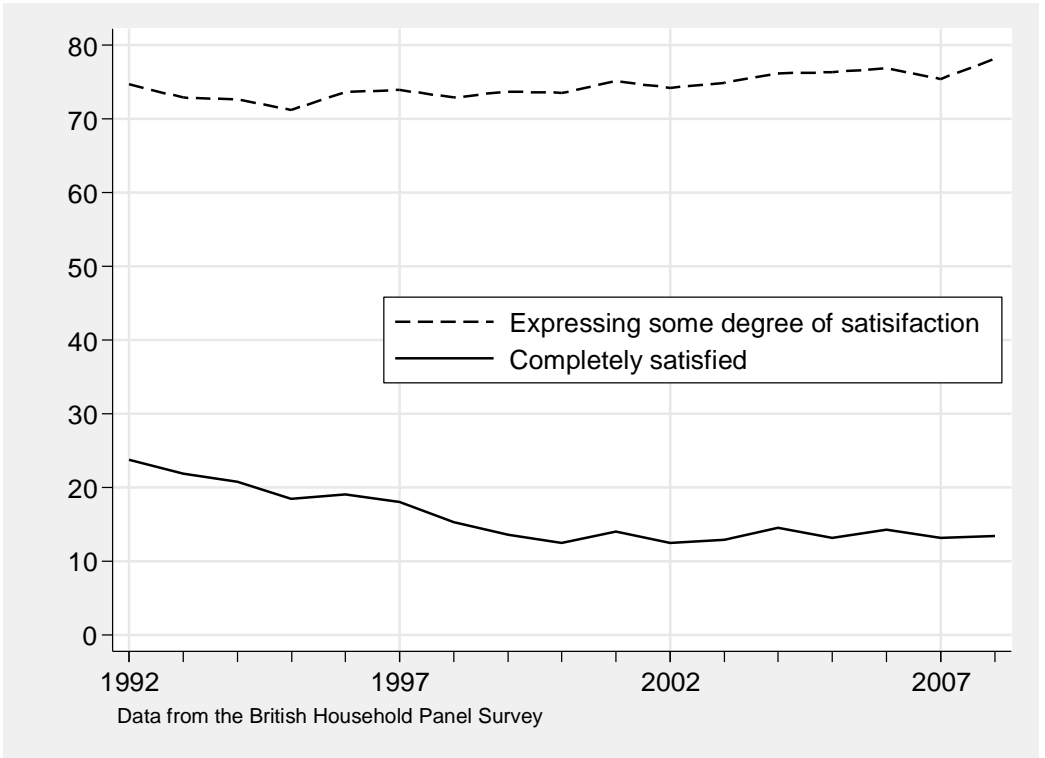
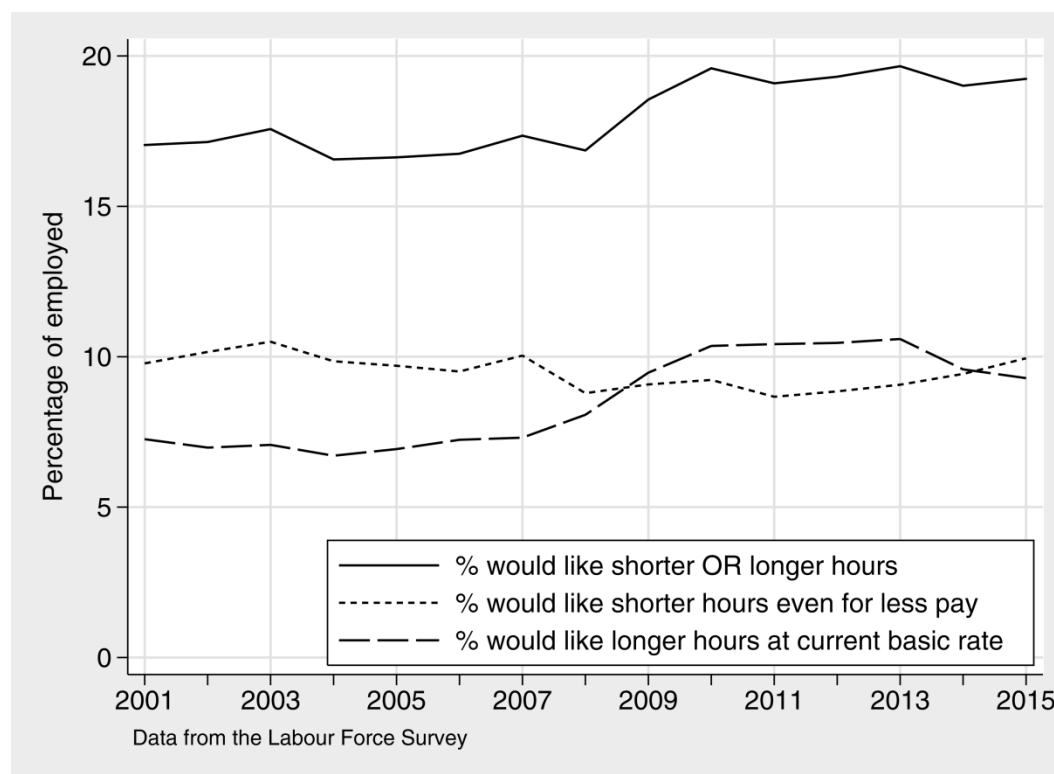


Figure 9.11: Satisfaction with hours worked (2001-15, Q4)



The Labour Force Survey also records data on satisfaction with hours worked from the early 2000s. This shows a similar proportion wanting longer or shorter hours to those measured as unsatisfied in the BHPS (figure 9.11). Furthermore, the proportion is again stable through the early 2000s. This changes from 2008-9 when underemployment becomes more widespread, reflecting the propensity of employers to hoard labour while reducing hours and pay. Perceived underemployment falls from 2013 but by 2015 still remains above the levels seen in run-up to the crisis.

Extrinsic factors do, overall, point to a connection between job status insecurity and generalised job tenure insecurity, with both concentrated in the 1990s and the post 2008-9 period.

9.6.2 Intrinsic factors

On intrinsic factors leading to job status insecurity the data is sparser. Table 9.12 shows selected indicators from SES, for the years 1992, 2006 and 2012 (the only years when this data is available).

Table 9.12: Selected indicators of job status security (1992, 2006, 2012)

| Satisfaction with: | | 1992 | 2006 | 2012 |
|---|--------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Relations with supervisors and managers | Completely satisfied | 19.2% | 20.0% | 17.3% |
| | Some degree of satisfaction | 83.7% | 81.6% | 80.1% |
| | Some degree of dissatisfaction | 7.3% | 7.4% | 8.8% |
| | Complete dissatisfaction | 1.5% | 1.5% | 1.5% |
| Opportunity to use one's abilities | Completely satisfied | 19.5% | 20.6% | 16.7% |
| | Some degree of satisfaction | 84.1% | 85.1% | 82.9% |
| | Some degree of dissatisfaction | 8.0% | 7.1% | 7.1% |
| | Complete dissatisfaction | 1.3% | 1.0% | 1.2% |
| Being able to use initiative | Completely satisfied | 23.1% | 24.7% | 18.7% |
| | Some degree of satisfaction | 86.6% | 88.5% | 84.9% |
| | Some degree of dissatisfaction | 6.1% | 5.1% | 5.5% |
| | Complete dissatisfaction | 0.9% | 0.6% | 0.8% |
| The work itself | Completely satisfied | 18.1% | 15.8% | 13.8% |
| | Some degree of satisfaction | 87.6% | 87.7% | 84.9% |
| | Some degree of dissatisfaction | 4.4% | 5.0% | 6.7% |
| | Complete dissatisfaction | 0.7% | 0.7% | 0.8% |
| The amount of work | Completely satisfied | 10.9% | 10.0% | 8.5% |
| | Some degree of satisfaction | 76.8% | 76.2% | 72.3% |
| | Some degree of dissatisfaction | 11.1% | 12.0% | 15.1% |
| | Complete dissatisfaction | 1.3% | 1.0% | 1.0% |
| The variety of work | Completely satisfied | 16.2% | 17.2% | 14.9% |
| | Some degree of satisfaction | 82.1% | 84.1% | 80.2% |
| | Some degree of dissatisfaction | 6.9% | 6.5% | 7.0% |
| | Complete dissatisfaction | 1.2% | 0.5% | 1.1% |

(Source: SES)

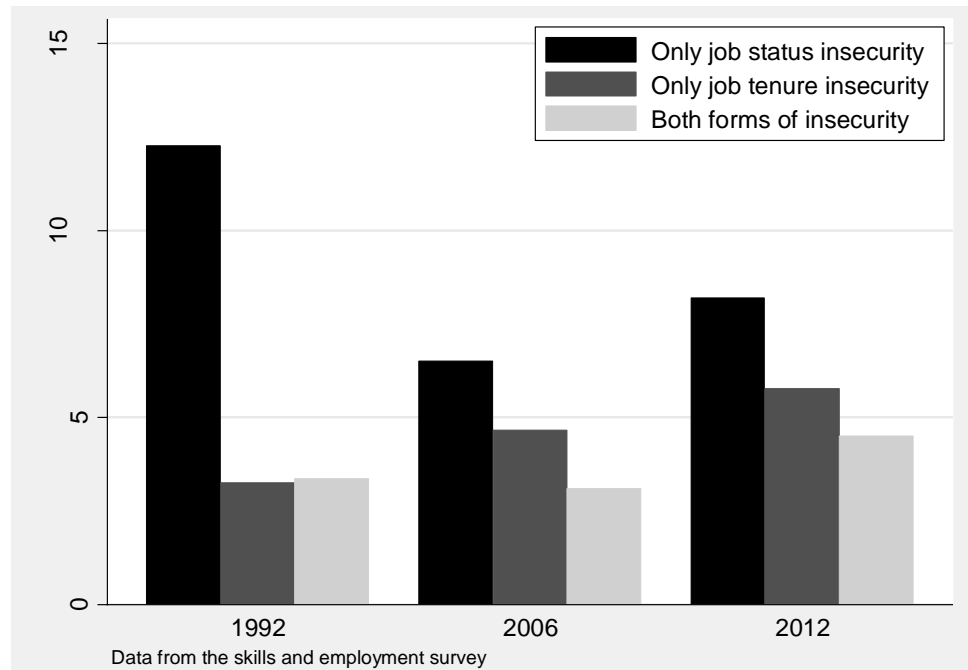
The changes in the 14 years from 1992 to 2006 are modest, though it is impossible to say what happened in between. Larger shifts seem to have occurred in the wake of the recession. Here, by each criterion, there has been a rise in job status insecurity. Unfortunately, there is insufficient data to determine whether, compared to earlier periods, the 1990s also represented a time of heightened job status insecurity based on intrinsic factors.

9.6.3 Is job status insecurity more prevalent than job tenure insecurity?

Gallie et al (2017) claim that there is evidence that job status insecurity is more prevalent than job tenure insecurity. Figure 9.12 shows all those expressing some degree of dissatisfaction with either the security of their employment or with the job itself. Job

status insecurity is, by this measure, indeed more prevalent in all three years covered by the relevant questions in the SES. Despite the widespread narrative of precarity, many workers remain more concerned about the content of their employment than its continuity.

Figure 9.12: Prevalence of the two forms of insecurity (1992, 2006, 2012)



However, and with the important caveat that different stages in economic cycles are being considered in the figure shown, there is evidence that by the time of the post-recessionary rise in insecurity, registered in the 2012 data, there had been some convergence between generalised job tenure insecurity and job status insecurity.

9.6.4 *The two forms of insecurity*

How does the data examined in this section fit with the thesis that job status insecurity helps to feed job tenure insecurity? There is, as noted, a paucity of consistent data on job status insecurity which makes it hard to derive firm conclusions. Nonetheless, the evidence considered here suggests that job status insecurity rose—and job satisfaction fell—in the mid to late 1990s and again in the wake of the 2008-9 recession. These are precisely the periods in which there was widespread generalised job tenure insecurity.

At a minimum, it appears that discontent with employment is tangled up and coordinated with reported anxiety about the continuity of employment, as some of the authors

considered in sections 4.4.3 and 9.5 above suggest, even if the lack of data makes it hard to be more definitive about the line of causation. Given the sceptical position taken here regarding the actual growth of employment precarity, the narrative of a climate of uncertainty created by work intensification and performance management leading to growing generalised insecurity, of both species, in the workplace is a compelling one.

9.7 Summary

The findings of this chapter show that there has been no straightforward secular rise in insecurity since the 1980s. The proposition of rising job tenure insecurity cannot be sustained for the period as a whole. However, the trends are complex and appear to reflect a range of different drivers.

Job tenure insecurity can be divided into two forms, generalised and acute. The former is a broader measure of job tenure insecurity, the latter a sharper level of concern that job loss may be imminent. Acute job tenure insecurity, on aggregate, closely follows the pattern of involuntary redundancies in the UK labour force. This suggests that people most fear imminent job loss when those around them are indeed facing involuntary redundancy, a disarmingly simple explanation. This would explain the high levels of acute job tenure insecurity in the early 1980s, a period in which there were widespread redundancies, especially in manufacturing industry. Acute job tenure insecurity has never returned to these levels, not even in the wake of the 2008-9 recession. On this measure, job tenure insecurity has tended to decline in the neoliberal period following the initial shock of the restructuring of the UK economy under the Thatcher government.

Generalised job tenure insecurity does not track involuntary redundancies. It is likely that it is linked to wider environmental factors including the growing neoliberal ideology of flexibility, the way in which job tenure insecurity became more widespread among professionals, managers and older workers, and wider attacks on working conditions. The heyday for generalised job tenure insecurity was the early to mid-1990s, which saw growing discontent with a number of aspects of working life. For much of the subsequent period, generalised job tenure insecurity declined. It increased again in the wake of the 2008-9 recession, a fact hardly surprising given the scale and prolonged nature of this crisis, the deterioration in pay, the imposition of austerity policies that led to a decline in public sector employment and the widespread commentary about precarity referred to in this thesis.

Connected with this, there is some evidence for heightened job status insecurity in the 1990s, mainly due to extrinsic factors, and in the years after 2008-9 due to both extrinsic and intrinsic factors. However, the data is extremely limited. For instance, questions on

satisfaction with the “use of initiative” within a job or “relations with the boss”, which appear in early iterations of the BHPS, disappear towards the end of the 1990s. In the SES, too, relevant questions only appear in certain years. The possibility that heightened job status insecurity drove an increase in generalised job tenure insecurity is compelling and is certainly not ruled out by the data examined here.

Finally for all the concern about precarity attributed to workers by authors on the radical left, for many workers, concern about their job declining in quality still seems, if by a narrowing margin, more prevalent than concern about their job being terminated.

10 Conclusions

10.1 The problems of precarity and insecurity

It is often assumed that growing precarity and insecurity go hand in hand with neoliberalism—and for some this heralds a transformation that fundamentally undermines the potential power of workers to challenge capitalism. Yet these claims are often presented with limited evidence to support them. This thesis contributes to efforts to fill that gap in the literature by offering a detailed empirical account of the evolution of employment precarity and insecurity in the case of the UK.

Definitions of precarity and insecurity have been derived. This involved an analysis of existing sociology of work literature, and it necessitated choices reflecting the need for a definition that can be operationalised. Precarity has been defined as an objective situation in which employment becomes more contingent. This can be studied through the evolution of the use of forms of non-standard employment that allow employers to terminate jobs more easily. It is also necessary to consider employment tenure as it is entirely possible for employment to become more contingent on the basis of unchanged employment status.

Insecurity was defined as a subjective counterpart to precarity. It can be divided into job tenure insecurity, reflecting fears about the continuity of employment, and job status insecurity, reflecting fears about the loss of valued features of work. It is typically measured in surveys of the labour force by asking workers how they feel about aspects of their security in work.

These parsimonious definitions contribute to the literature by making categories that have often been vague and ephemeral measureable using existing large-scale survey data.

10.2 Against the common sense

The extent of precarity and the extent of insecurity in the UK have each been measured. Here the thesis presents results strikingly at odds with much of the common sense about employment.

Employment tenure has proved relatively stable throughout the neoliberal period in the UK. The average person in work in 2015 could expect their existing employment to last a total of 16 years, roughly the same as in 1975. Male tenure has declined somewhat, especially in the 1980s when various industries with abnormal numbers of men with very high tenure, such as banking and retail, were restructured. However, female tenure, including that of part-time women workers, rose through much of the period. One result has been that tenure has converged strongly between the genders. From this perspective

the neoliberal period has been one of increasing integration of women into the workforce on a stable basis, though this does not mean that other forms of gender inequality such as the gender pay gap have disappeared.

As regards non-standard employment, there is little evidence that permanent employment will cease to be the norm for the overwhelming majority any time soon. Over 90 percent of the employed workforce is in permanent, direct employment. At most this figure has declined by 4 percent since the 1980s and, given the much less comprehensive data on non-standard contracts available for the earlier period, it is likely that the decline is less, if there is one at all.

The trends on self-employment are harder to read. Self-employment increased from about 12 percent to 15 percent of the labour force from 2001 to 2015. However, it is unlikely that all of this growth involves precarious forms of false self-employment. There has been no overall growth in contractors or freelancers and, while there has been a growth of self-employed people with no employees, this group seems quite mixed. Certainly in the aggregate data there is little sign of an emergent “gig economy”, characterised by large numbers undertaking work as self-employed contractors operating via online applications or undertaking “microjobs” offered by web-based platforms. False self-employment instead remains most concentrated in areas where it has long existed, notably construction.

Both job tenure and the prevalence of non-standard employment have strong counter-cyclical elements. Job tenure rises in the wake of crises, as does the use of forms of employment such as temporary work and agency work, especially among younger workers. This makes it necessary to disentangle the cyclical and secular components of the changes to employment witnessed since the beginning of the neoliberal period. The period since the 2008-9 recession has been no exception. Again there has been a rise in tenure and in the use of non-standard employment. There are however signs that the growth of non-standard employment is beginning to attenuate or even go into reverse. It cannot be automatically assumed that phenomena such as the rise of zero-hours contracts or false self-employment will continue to grow. Such erroneous extrapolation from rises in temporary and agency work in the 1990s led to a range of demonstrably false predictions about the future of employment.

On the basis of the findings, the proposition of growing precarity—“Over the neoliberal period in the UK, the employment relationship has become, objectively, more contingent”—has been rejected.

This should not be taken to mean that there are no precarious workers. For instance, the use of zero-hours contracts among the growing student workforce and, more worryingly, among those engaged in adult social care without accommodation suggest that there are

contexts in which employers have incentives to make employees more precarious. However, there are also countertendencies at work that tend to hem in precarity in certain areas of employment, rather than generalising it across the workforce as a whole. Even in areas such as social care, and food and beverage serving, employers can become concerned about levels of staff turnover, especially if labour markets become tighter.

On the question of insecurity, the data is weaker. It has been shown that there is no straightforward growth in insecurity across the neoliberal period in the UK. The proposition of growing insecurity—“Over the neoliberal period in the UK, workers’ fears that the employment relationship may be terminated by their employer have grown”—cannot be sustained by the data. The trends are more complex and contradictory. A close examination of the data suggests a distinction between what have here been termed acute job tenure insecurity and generalised job tenure insecurity. The former is found to track closely the actual involuntary redundancy rate. People feel more likely to lose their job in periods when they are (in relatively terms) more likely to lose their job. While acute job tenure insecurity can be expected to rise in recessions, the trajectory across the neoliberal period as a whole is downward, because involuntary redundancies have tended to fall.

However, this pattern does not apply to generalised job tenure insecurity, the more general fear of the possibility of job loss in the future. This rose in the 1990s and again after the 2008-9 recession. Three tentative suggestions are offered to explain this. First, whatever the overall extent of insecurity it has become more evenly spread through the workforce, encompassing managers and professionals to a far greater degree. This may amplify the climate of insecurity because those with a greater voice in society express their concerns. Second, the rise of competitive pressures on capitalist firms in the neoliberal period has led to a “manufactured uncertainty” in the workplace, of the kind identified by Pierre Bourdieu (1998), Kevin Doogan (2009) and others. This is reinforced by a degree of welfare retrenchment that worsens the consequences of job loss. Third, generalised job tenure insecurity appears to rise in periods in which job status insecurity is also growing. This suggests that people may express insecurity about the continuity of their job when they are in reality primarily anxious about other changes in work—the intensification of work, overwork or reduced hours, deteriorating pay and so on. In other words, insecurity can reflect the shifting of what Carter Goodrich (1975) famously dubbed “the frontier of control” in the workplace in favour of employers.

10.3 Precarity and the retreat from class

Given the limited evidence for the growth in precarity in the UK case it is reasonable to ask why the literature has tended to adopt an approach that accepts growing precarity as a kind of common sense.

Within academia there are a number of factors that might well reinforce notions of generalised precarity. Academics not only rub shoulders with participants in the student labour market but also themselves occupy institutions that disproportionately use fixed-term contracts, as noted in section 6.2. This reflects the way that universities, a growing sector of employment over the recent period, have proactively adopted a neoliberal model of internal organisation in the form of “new public management” doctrines, leading to private sector methods of measuring “performance”, both in terms of academic output and financial competitiveness (Ball, 2012; Radice, 2013; Morgan and Wood, 2017). This helps to explain why support services such as cleaning and catering, characterised by relatively low levels of skill, have been contracted out so extensively in this sector.

It does not, however, fully explain how universities were able to attain such high levels of temporary work among academics, who are, after all, generally themselves the recipients of at least seven years of education and training following their schooling merely to gain access to a PhD and an academic career. Here, again, a peculiarity of this particular labour market must be considered. There is an oversupply of people holding postgraduate degrees who wish to enter the profession, with dozens and sometimes hundreds of applicants attempting to secure early career posts (Grove, 2014). This is the case despite superior salaries in other fields employing people with similar levels of education, suggesting that the reasons people pursue academic careers do not reflect the rational income-maximising behaviour beloved of conventional economic theory (Morgan and Wood, 2017). At the same time, the temporalities of academic work—teaching, for instance, is not a continuous process but takes place at specific moments over specific periods of the academic year—offer savings to universities that take advantage of the weak position of entrants into this particular labour market.

It is likely that these direct and indirect experiences of precarity strengthen a tendency for academics to generalise from precarious groups to the wider labour force. This is further reinforced by the tendency of some authors, noted in section 3.2, to study precarity primarily by talking to precarious groups of workers. While this is quite understandable, and entirely necessary from a qualitative perspective, from a more quantitative perspective it can create a misleading picture.

A third factor that might distort perceptions of precarity is the variation that takes place through the business cycle, noted at various points in chapter 6 and notwithstanding the variation between cycles noted in chapter 8. For instance, in periods of recovery from recession, employers are more likely to take on employees on a temporary basis, leading to an increase in levels of agency and temporary work, especially among younger workers who are new to the labour force. This can lead to a distorted picture if the point in the cycle is not taken into account. It is no coincidence that many of the most dubious claims about the growth of non-standard employment, including some of those cited in section 1.2

above, were made in the mid-to-late 1990s or at the start of the 2000s. These views often extrapolated from the rises in temporary and agency work in the wake of the 1990-1 recession. Similarly, care needs to be taken in assessing the use of these contracts in the wake of the 2008-9 recession. It is too early to say, for instance, to what extent the recent rises in temporary and agency work or the apparent increase in use of zero-hours contracts are embedded in the labour market, and to what extent a stronger recovery will mitigate against their use. As noted in section 8.10 as of 2016 use of some forms of non-standard work seem to be levelling off or declining.

However, the grip of the idea of precarity is such that it is unlikely that it is simply a case of inaccurate measurement, narrowness of vision or the location of those making the claims in more precarious areas of employment. There are additional factors that must be considered. A tendency has already been noted in the discussion in chapter 2 to prioritise the forces of production over relations of production, to use the Marxist terminology. Rather than the two being seen as in dynamic and dialectical tension with one another, it is simply assumed that the forces of production develop in such a way as to reconfigure employment. Confirmation of this perspective can then be sought in the facts. In the extreme case of the theorists of transformation, this often includes a complete reconfiguration of the relations of production, leading to sweeping conceptions of change akin in their scale to those that marked the transition from feudalism to capitalism. In reality, as discussed above, the changes to employment are more modest precisely because of the constraints—in particular the need for regular and reliable access to the correct forms of labour-power—imposed by capitalist relations of production.

The influence of such ideas cannot be understood in isolation from a general ideological climate, characterised as it is by intense scepticism about the capacity of the working class to challenge capitalism. This is rooted in the extraordinary reversals to working class self-organisation and struggle since the 1970s across most of the advanced capitalist countries (Choonara, 2013, pp.64-65, 73; Silver, 2003, pp.1-2). It is in the wake of these defeats that what Ellen Meiksins Wood ([1986] 1998) describes, in a work first published in 1986, as a “retreat from class” took place.

At the risk of being schematic, the retreat can be seen as passing through three phases. Initially it was, as Wood writes (1998, pp.3-4), premised simply on the understanding that the “working class has not, as Marx expected, produced a revolutionary movement. That is, its economic situation has not given rise to what was thought to be an appropriate corresponding political force.” The response on the radical left largely took the form of post-Marxism, meant to denote a residual debt to Marxist theory, but, by the time of the publication of the second edition of Wood’s book in 1998, she adds that “post-Marxism was just a short pit-stop on the way to *anti-Marxism*” (Wood, 1998, p. xii). This anti-Marxism was associated strongly with the emergence of postmodernism and

post-structuralism, which by 1998 came to be identified with the decline of radical critiques of the system and the triumphalism of Western capitalism following the end of the Cold War. Indeed, some of the most enthusiastic converts to postmodernism were the disillusioned “1968 generation”, members of the new left shaped in the upturn of class struggle in the 1960s and early 1970s only to face the failure of those movements to successfully challenge capitalism (Callinicos, 1989, pp.164-168). The same disillusionment informed the mid-1990s appeal of the “Third Way” within social democratic parties. As one book length account of “socialisms old and new” by then MP Tony Wright (1996, p.88), with a preface by none other than Tony Blair, puts it, “Socialism’s traditional actors have not displayed a reliable talent for keeping to their script.... The western working class has not merely failed to fulfil the revolutionary role assigned to it by classical Marxism...but has seemed to become ever *less* revolutionary.”

By November 1999, a year after the second edition of Wood’s book, a new phase in this process of retreat from class was signalled as tens of thousands of protesters gathered in Seattle to successfully shut down the World Trade Organisation meeting in that city. This event marked a re-emergence of anti-capitalist movements accompanied by a revival in anti-capitalist thinking (Callinicos, 2003b, pp.4-13). While Marxism has been one strand in this revival, the post-1999 radicalism is also heavily infused with post-structuralist ideas and is often disinclined to identify with what seem entirely passé notions of workers as the privileged subject of anti-capitalist projects. Worse still, these notions are often associated with discredited Stalinist and social democratic movements. The resonance of Negri’s autonomist version of anti-capitalism, discussed in detail in section 2.3 above, is one instance. As one sympathetic account of autonomism puts it:

[W]e can be sure that the paradigm of class that constituted the old revolutionary project has come asunder. It has been broken from many sides: the structural changes to capitalism, the incorporation and management of social democracy and the radical claims and challenges of other social struggles (Eden, 2012, p.5).

If the lack of appeal of socialism is understandable, given the legacy of social democracy and Communism in the 20th century, it also fails fully to come to terms with their shortcomings. To do so requires the disentangling of two interrelated processes. The first is the defeats themselves. There are explanations for these requiring no special thesis of class restructuring. Rather it was the capacity of reformist forces—including those linked to both the social democratic and Communist traditions—that helped the ruling class contain the radical impulses that erupted from 1968 onwards, and the revolutionary element within these struggles was neither sizeable enough nor implanted enough in the working class to overcome the political hold of reformism. This was most pronounced in

France, where the spring 1968 general strike was the largest such action seen in Western Europe up to that point, but it was echoed across the continent. As Alex Callinicos writes:

The intervention of the French Communist Party to end the general strike of May-June 1968 was repeated on numerous occasions elsewhere, from the Social Contract struck by the British Trade Union Congress with the Labour government of 1974-9 to the 1977 Moncloa pact through which the Spanish Communist and Socialist Parties pledged their support to Franco's heirs. Class compromises of this kind allowed Western capital to weather the great recessions of the mid-1970s and early 1980s and indeed to use them to restructure and to rationalise (Callinicos, 1989, p.168; on the role of reformism in stabilising Europe in the wake of 1968, see also, Harman, 1998, pp.332-346).

As Callinicos notes, this then created the terrain on which the second process, the restructuring associated with the emergence of neoliberalism, of a more modest sort than is supposed by the theorists of transformation, took place. For instance, in Britain the widely recognised decline of manufacturing employment, and the rise of service sector, public sector and financial sector employment, have created or swelled the size of groups with relatively little tradition of militant class struggle—and less still of successful class struggle. Already in 1979, one commentary by a revolutionary socialist in the UK noted of the preceding five years:

While the traditional key sections of the working class—miners, engineers and dockers—were by and large acquiescent, other sections came to the fore, especially at the end of the [1976-9] Callaghan government... These were hospital workers, local government workers and white collar workers. Alas, this section, in terms of even the statistics of strike records, didn't fill the gap left by the others (Cliff, 2002, p.371).

The question that arises today is whether such groups can, in fact, “fill the gap” created by the decline of traditional groups such as miners, engineers and dockers in the UK labour force. Some have concluded that the “de-industrialisation in the [global] North has halted and reversed the forward march of labour” and the “residual industrial working class in the North remains too weak to pose any anti-capitalist challenge” (Therborn, 2014, pp.7, 9). However, Beverly Silver (2003), in a fascinating study of workers' movements since 1870, suggests a broader historical and geographical framework, in which recurrent patterns of workers' struggle emerge, but in different locations both geographically and sectorally. Relevant to the present topic, she notes that, for example, along with the rapid growth of the world's teaching force, “from 8 million in 1950 to 47 million in 1990”, the education industry has “been the site of growing labour unrest worldwide in the second half of the 20th century”. Indeed, “the geographical spread of teacher labour unrest has

been far greater than was the case historically for the textile and automobile industries” (Silvers, 2003, p.115). This global shift encompasses the UK. An early observer of this process, Stephen Ball, traces the growing militancy of teachers back to the education reforms that began at the end of the 1960s, leading to greater emphasis on regulation and control of the labour process:

In this historical process the immediate work experience of the teacher is undergoing a significant shift from that approximating a classical, if limited, professionalism towards that of technical labourer... Increasingly teachers see it to be in their interests to oppose the measures introduced by management in specific instances and to be “in opposition” to management in general terms (Ball, 1988, p.292).

Ball sees these factors as underlying the build-up to the industrial action by teachers in 1985-6. A more recent two-year study of teachers by Bob Carter and Howard Stevenson (2012) shows that the experience of educational reform under subsequent Labour governments saw further work intensification, a strengthening of managerial control and a decline of autonomy.

This kind of gradual transformation is a reminder that the emergence of workers’ militancy is typically a *process* rather than an event. As the American Marxist Hal Draper (1978, p.52) writes:

Most of the problems of proletarian revolution stem from the massive role of divisions, disproportions and disparities within the working classes, among its different sectors and among its individuals. The process of overcoming these diversities and discords is a key part of the road to proletarian revolution. One can view this process as one of maturation.

The key term here is *maturation*. Conversely, in the absence of struggle, particularly successful struggle, there can be periods of regression. However, the structural position occupied by workers, then and now, within the relations of production tends to impel them, over time, to rediscover their capacities (Choonara, 2018).

10.4 Contribution to the literature

The thesis contributes to the existing literature of the sociology of work in several ways. First, it fills a gap in empirical knowledge of the evolution of precarity and insecurity in the UK, presenting an account, summarised in section 10.2, challenging aspects of the common sense.

Second, it contests the view that precarity and insecurity can automatically be identified with the neoliberal period. If they have not straightforwardly risen in the UK, which has certainly experienced the imposition of a neoliberal policy regime since the 1980s, it cannot be assumed, without a careful examination of the data, that they have risen elsewhere.

Third, it offers a theoretical contribution to the understanding of labour markets. A distinctive Marxist approach has been set out, which seeks to connect the employment relation to the wider political economy of capitalism. This avoids a one-sided account of the employment relation by stressing the mutual interdependence of capital and labour. In this context, the imperatives driving capital are contradictory. While the need for flexibility and to reduce labour costs might suggest advantages to greater precarity, there is also a requirement among employers to obtain and retain the correct forms of labour-power, and to avoid the difficulties and costs associated with dispensing with workers.

At a lower level of abstraction, the account here also rejects the notion of a single, uniform labour market. There is a plethora of interacting labour markets, each structured in a distinctive manner. This implies that the contradictory pressures at work will play out in different ways in different areas of the labour force.

The need to reproduce labour-power through gendered social relations imposes another set of contradictory pressures on labour markets, which, over the neoliberal period, has tended to result in a greater integration of women into the labour force, albeit on the basis of continued oppression and inequality. Alongside this, the state actively intervenes to help create, maintain and regulate labour markets. Often in the neoliberal period this has taken the form of introducing individual employment rights in the place of the voluntarist and collective regulation of employment that prevailed in the UK economy earlier in the 20th century. While the state might sometimes act to engender precarity and weaken the position of workers, it can also operate as a force seeking to establish long-term stability for capital by ensuring the reproduction of labour-power and by creating a “level playing field” in which all capitalists are obliged to provide a basic minimum set of rights for employees.

Fourth and finally, the thesis contributes to debates about the nature of class in contemporary society. There is an extensive literature, here brought together under the rubric of the theorists of transformation, which questions the continued capacity of the working class to challenge capitalist domination. As has been shown, appeals to the growing precarity and insecurity of workers are a significant focus for this literature. These approaches, if accepted, would render pointless any strategy of social

transformation that privileged the working class as the agent of change, particularly strategies associated with classical Marxism.

The discussion of the literature in chapter 2 questions these approaches primarily on theoretical grounds. In the absence of the kind of approach to employment proposed here, they tend to emphasise the relentless progress of the forces of production without paying sufficient attention to the relations of production that fetter their development and necessitate a degree of stability in employment relations. The resulting one-dimensional approach to the evolution of employment cannot do justice to the real changes that have occurred, tending instead to collapse into Promethean celebration or pessimistic handwringing. Often sustaining the arguments of the theorists of transformation involves creating synthetic categories, such as Standing's putative precariat, composed by aggregating disparate types of workers together and counterposing them to a highly idealised figure of the white, male, unionised car worker circa 1960.

The emergence of such accounts has been located in the context of the defeats suffered by the working class struggles that emerged from the late 1960s and the subsequent decline in levels of organisation and self-activity of workers in most advanced capitalist countries. Rather than addressing the causes of these defeats, which in the UK largely preceded the lengthy reorganisation of employment that has taken place with the shift from manufacturing to services, the accounts by the theorists of transformation instead tend to envisage a wholesale reordering of the class structure of society.

10.5 Implications for future research

In the UK context, the analysis in this thesis can be further developed by examining regional patterns of precarity and insecurity, which are not investigated here. The analysis also needs to be extended into the future, as the impact of the 2008-9 crisis on the UK economy does not appear to have exhausted itself and may possibly be compounded by British exit from the European Union, due to take place in 2019. It cannot be said definitively at this stage whether certain trends noted in recent years represent a cyclical or secular change in employment patterns. This is the case, for instance, with the apparent flattening of the job tenure path for younger workers joining the labour market in the wake of the crisis, noted in chapter 7.

Another limitation of this thesis is that it focuses on quantitative aspects of precarity and insecurity. This is another area in which future research can extend the analysis. The approach here provides a broader context for subsequent qualitative work, which can examine in more detail the experience in specific areas of employment while avoiding overgeneralisation of the results of these studies.

Beyond the UK, the categories and approach here suggest a method that might be adapted for comparative studies of precarity and insecurity in multiple countries, provided suitable data is available.

Throughout the thesis a number of shortcomings of large-scale surveys in the UK have been noted. As these surveys are for the most part still ongoing, some recommendations can be made:

- Given the interest in the so-called gig economy, as well as in forms of false self-employment, the Labour Force Survey (LFS), the main source of information about employment in the UK, should cease treating self-employment as inherently and necessarily distinct from employment. Unfortunately, at present, once people declare themselves to be self-employed, they are no longer asked questions about their work situation, such as whether they receive training or whether they have a supervisory role in a workplace.
- Furthermore, the LFS should begin asking interviewees whether they use an online application to obtain work. Additional questions ought to distinguish between those obtaining discrete tasks (as with online platforms such as Amazon's Mechanical Turk) and those obtaining customers as part of a single ongoing job (as with Uber or Deliveroo).
- It has been noted in sections 3.5.3 and 6.3 that there is a group of agency workers who regard themselves as "permanent" rather than "temporary" employees. The LFS ought to ask them whether it is their relationship with their agency or with the employer with whom they are placed that they regard as permanent.
- Given the uncertainty over the extent of agency work in the UK, there is a case for a new national survey of agencies supplying agency workers, as was undertaken by the Department for Business Innovation and Skills in 2007.
- It would be helpful if the LFS asked whether the previous job held by the interviewee was temporary in order to track movement between temporary and permanent jobs.
- The ONS's survey of businesses to estimate the number of zero-hours contracts, discussed in section 3.5.4, is a useful counterpart to the estimates available in the LFS. It should be repeated periodically.
- On insecurity, the Understanding Society Survey (USS), successor to the British Household Panel Survey, should resume the latter's practice of asking questions about employment insecurity. There is currently a lack of annual surveys offering insights into the development of insecurity in the UK.
- It is advantageous to use two forms of wording in survey questions about job tenure insecurity. One should ask how likely interviewees think it is that they will lose their job in the coming year and the other should ask them how secure they

feel in their job. It is important that the responses continue to be graded consistently on a scale in order to distinguish acute and generalised job tenure insecurity.

- The USS and other surveys should also consider asking interviewees on a regular basis whether they think their job is more or less secure than the typical job these days, as this would allow information to be gleaned about how interviewee's perceptions of their own security affects their view of that of the labour force as a whole.
- Consistent data, preferably on an annual basis, is also required on job status insecurity. Given that there is broad agreement on the features of the job considered valuable by employees (see sections 4.4.3 and 9.6), it should be possible to include questions about these in the surveys considered in chapter 9.

10.6 Implications for political practice

One of the prime motivations for the author in undertaking this research was to contest theories of the disappearance or impotence of the working class. Not only have the theorists of transformation been challenged on theoretical grounds but also on the grounds of the paucity of the empirical evidence for their claims. It has been argued that, in objective terms, the working class has not been restructured into a state of powerlessness. This being the case, it is necessary to confront, both theoretically and practically, other possible reasons for the relative quiescence of the working class in recent decades.

In this context, joining the clamour to argue that precarity has undermined the capacities of the working class is counterproductive. The response of the Trade Union Congress (TUC) general secretary, Frances O'Grady, and other union leaders to a report in June 2017 stating that union membership had fallen by 4.2 percent in a year exemplified this problem. They claimed that this decline was, in part, a consequence of the "gig economy"; O'Grady argued that many of the jobs created in recent years were "insecure" and the TUC produced a report highlighting the growing number of workers now in precarious jobs (Topping, 2017; TUC, 2017a). Given the limited changes to levels of precarity demonstrated here, this begins to seem like an alibi for a decline in union membership that has taken place over decades, while also suggesting that nothing can be done about the minority of precarious workers that do exist.

There are three implications of this research for trade unions and other organisations orientated on workers. First, while there are precarious workers there is no precariat. Workers in a precarious position are no less able to resist capitalism than were the highly casualised London dock workers who led the 1889 strike that helped to establish New

Unionism in the UK (Pelling, 1992, p.87-90). These workers too were once regarded as irredeemably downtrodden by sections of the left, with the Fabian Beatrice Webb (1889-98, p.328) writing in her diary in 1894, “What can we hope from these myriads of deficient minds and deformed bodies that swarm in our great cities—what can we hope from them but brutality, meanness and crime; whether they are struggling for subsistence at the dock gates, or eking out their days in the poor law or penal colony.”

There are plenty of instances of precarious workers organising in recent years (Hardy, 2017). One noteworthy example from the UK is that of the notionally self-employed couriers of Deliveroo in London, who overturned a proposed change to their contracts. They did so in coordination with the small IWGB union, using some quite familiar tactics—pickets, mass meetings and appeals for strike funds—while also publicising and organising their action using the very Internet technology that has supposedly rendered them precarious (Wood, 2016).

Second, precarious workers often coexist in workplaces with those who are less precarious, and here it is in the interest of both groups of workers to challenge precarity. Such efforts can win: precisely because of the contradictory tendencies discussed in chapter 8, precarity cannot be seen as an unstoppable and irreversible force. For instance, in August 2017 victory was declared in an 11-year campaign at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London to bring support services back in house following their contracting out (Unison, 2017). The employees in question were largely migrant workers, some of whom had been deported or threatened with deportation in the course of their struggle. Their campaign won widespread support and solidarity from other, often less precarious, workers at the university, as well as students and the trade union movement more generally. The victory followed a similar success at the London School of Economics, which saw the largest ever strike by a group of cleaners at a single workplace (UVW, 2017). Given that many of the temporary or zero-hours workers who do exist are in large public sector workplaces, which often have a union presence, there is lots of scope for such action in the future.

More generally, there are political demands around precarious work that the labour movement as a whole can and should make. Two of these have been touched on in the context of the discussion of the Taylor Review in chapter 8. The proposal in the review that work beyond the hours contracted be remunerated at a higher rate of National Minimum Wage is a sensible one that would do much to deter the use of zero-hours contracts or short-hours contracts by unscrupulous employers. As noted above, Taylor simply leaves it to the Low Pay Commission to consider the proposal. The labour movement could campaign for this measure to be introduced and for the higher rate of pay to be set at a punitive level.

Another potential demand could be for the abolition of the status of *worker*, as distinct from *employee*. In the context of minimal legislation it has, in practice, been left to case law to determine the statuses of different types of people who do work for an employer (Taylor et al, 2017, p.33). However, this is primarily a political question concerning how far certain rights offered by the state should extend. Taylor and his co-authors (2017, p.35) simply accept at face value the usefulness of the worker status in reflecting “the increasing casualisation of the labour market”, without pausing to ask whether casualisation is a good thing. Extending full employment rights to all categories of workers would remove an opportunity for employers to take advantage of the vagueness of the worker status, a status that only began to feature in UK labour law relatively recently, largely as a result of EU directives (Taylor and Emir, 2006, p.62). This change could also potentially bring employment law in line with tax law in which there are only two statuses. This proposal seems to be, in practice, equivalent to that advocated by the TUC (2017b, p.5) in its submission to the Taylor Review, namely to create a new worker status encompassing those currently defined as workers and employees, and to extend to this category “the same decent floor or rights currently enjoyed by employees”.

The third implication for the practice of the labour movement arises from the fact that, for most of the workforce, precarity is not the central issue. Indeed, evidence has been presented that it is not, for many, their central concern. As chapter 9 shows, job status insecurity is more prevalent in the labour force than job tenure insecurity. In chapter 8 it was argued that long employment tenure is not necessarily a good thing from the worker’s perspectives. It may be that the main problem is not so much that workers risk losing good jobs as that they are confined to lousy jobs that are deteriorating in quality.

Certainly the UK has, in the wake of the 2008-9 recession, witnessed the greatest fall in real wages in 70 years (Tetlow and O’Connor, 2016). Satisfaction with every measured intrinsic aspect of work in the Skills and Employment Survey fell from 2006 to 2012. In other words, there is a broad range of issues within the workplace, beyond that of precarity, for the labour movement and the radical left to take up. Organising around these issues might help to nurture the kind of rank and file movements that have historically allowed workers to regain their confidence and rebuild effective union organisation (Hyman, 1975, pp.150-184).

Furthermore, the analysis here suggests that workers have the potential to oppose the real attacks they face from conditions of relative strength. The labour force in the UK has not been rendered dispensable by capital in the neoliberal period; on the contrary, capital remains as dependent as ever on securing the labour-power it requires.

This thesis has, of course, only considered the objective capacity of labour to resist capital, not its willingness to do so. However, if the former is largely intact, it is the latter that

requires the attention of the labour movement and the radical left. New groups of workers will have to discover afresh their collective capacities and how best they can be mobilised in the pursuit of their interests. In promoting such a process, narratives of an endless rise of precarity issued by the left are merely disarming and demobilising.

Better the sage advice that George Orwell (1983, p.66) has his character Winston Smith pen in *1984*: "If there is hope, it lies in the proles."

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